

BEATRICE
AND
BENEDICK



HAWLEY SMART

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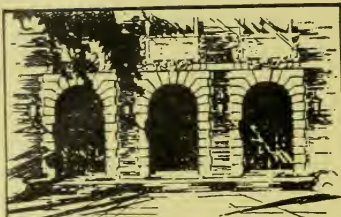
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BEATRICE AND BENEDICK.

A Romance of the Crimea.



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BEATRICE AND BENEDICK

A Romance of the Crimea.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

“BREEZIE LANGTON,” “AT FAULT,” “TIE AND TRICK,”

“LONG ODDS,” “WITHOUT LOVE OR LICENCE,”

“THE PLUNGER,” &c., &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO
HENRY IRVING,

In remembrance of many pleasant nights at the Lyceum, during which the idea of this story first suggested itself, this book is dedicated by his sincere friend and admirer,

HAWLEY SMART.

BEATRICE AND BENEDICK.

A Romance of the Crimea.



CHAPTER I.

MISSING.

THE mid-day storm of carnage is over. That we have been beaten at the Redan is well-known, and all attempt to take that work is for the present abandoned. The perpetual rattle of musketry confirms the report that the French have got the Malakoff, and are still fighting hard in the Karabelnaya suburb, to retain it. What we are to do next is canvassed on all sides—both in the trenches and out of them ; both among those in the advance and those in the reserve.

As Tom Byng pithily expresses it—“ It’s

not likely we are going to take a devil of a licking like this quietly; more especially as those French fellows have got in. Kicked out, by Jove, is the only way I can describe our leaving the Redan!"

The artillery duel *à outrance* seems to have been tacitly abandoned for the present. Like two dogs that have fought, both sides seem engaged in licking their wounds and catching their breath, preparatory to renewing the combat; only that spattering fire in the Karabelnaya suburb tells that the foe still clings to the hope of ousting the French from the Malakoff. So at least was his pertinacious resistance in that part construed by the Allies. Subsequent events showed that even the gallant Todleben at last recognised that the game was up, and that the struggle was only prolonged until darkness should cover the retreat.

Sunset came at last, and with it the reliefs for those who had spent the last weary hours in the trenches. The Russians somewhat

renewed their cannonade for the next two or three hours, then it suddenly died away, only to be succeeded by some loud explosions within their works.

“That sounds deuced like blowing up their magazines,” said an officer of the Engineers, in the advanced trench. “One explosion might have been an accident, but not two. I say Campbell,” he continued, turning to an officer of Highlanders who stood by, “the Redan has been awfully quiet for some time. Let’s go up and see if there’s anybody in it.”

The two officers accordingly dropped quietly over the parapet and stole through the darkness towards the work from which our people had been driven pell-mell in the morning. All was still as death. Slowly they picked their way amongst the dying and the dead across that grape-swept plateau until they reached the *abattis*. The Russian lines were perfectly mute, save now and again for a gun from a distant battery, or a slight

spattering exchange of musketry with the French in the rear of the Malakoff.

“ We’ll crawl up as close as they will let us,” whispered Campbell.

The Engineer nodded assent, and the two crept on cautiously until they reached the very ditch of the Redan. There they lay down and listened. After a pause of two or three minutes, during which no sound came from the interior of the work, the Engineer whispered :

“ It is empty ; we’ll just stay here a little longer to make sure, and then go back with our news.”

Five minutes elapsed, and still the same unbroken quiet ; after the awful turmoil of the last four days, the silence seemed perfectly weird-like. The two adventurers made their way rapidly back to the advance of the right attack, and at once communicated their discovery to the General commanding there. A small council of war was held upon the advisability of at once seizing upon the

abandoned work, but the wary veteran who commanded quickly closed the discussion with the remark, "If it's empty now we shall find it empty in the morning, and if it happens to be mined, it will probably be blown up by then." And it was well he so decided, for about daybreak a tremendous explosion emphatically announced that the work was empty, while the three or four explosions which speedily followed proclaimed that the Russians had blown up their magazines, and retreating across the harbour had abandoned the south side of Sebastopol.

By day-break the next morning it was known all through the lines of the Allies that the siege was over, and that the celebrated fortress had at length fallen. In the course of the day many officers and soldiers entered the town, having passed the chain of cavalry vedettes, now spread across the approaches to prevent their entrance, the Chiefs of the army still fearing there might be mines left not yet exploded, which produced the fol-

lowing sarcastic remark from Mr. Flinn—
“the divvil such a place iver I heard of. It’s harder a dale to get into than Heaven. Here’s first the Russians wouldn’t let us in, and now, begorra, our own Ginerall won’t let us pass. It ought to be a mighty pleasant place inside, for those that’s in it seem mighty anxious to keep it to themselves. It’s a murthering mistake I made when I listed, after all the months we’ve been taking it, to think we mayn’t even look at it.” Some few days had elapsed since Sebastopol had fallen and still no tidings could the —th get of Hugh Fleming. The last man who could positively speak of seeing him in the Redan was Phybbs, who was never tired of narrating the story of the part he took in the *mêlée*, of how his foot slipped, how Captain Fleming came to his rescue, and how the last he saw of him he was in the midst of a crowd of Russians. “And he saved my life he did,” he would invariably conclude in his rather boyish treble, which was apt, taken in conjunction with his un-

developed physique, to make his auditors wonder why he was sent out for such rough work. One or two hospitals had been discovered inside the town, the beds tenanted by the dead and hopelessly wounded ; hospitals too in dire condition, as was likely after having been filled to excess during that last terrible bombardment and then hastily abandoned. One English officer it was true was found therein alive, mortally wounded and delirious, whom death soon relieved from his suffering, but there was no trace of Hugh Fleming. One only hope had Tom Byng and his comrades, he was not amongst the killed found in the Redan, or on the plateau outside, and it was little likely the Russians had carried him off unless he had been alive. Still it was an extraordinary thing that no letter came from him, if he was a prisoner. Officers under those circumstances generally wrote, not only to relieve the anxiety of their friends, but for such necessities as money, clothes, etc. Then as far as they could each side

helped the other to complete the list of their casualties. But of Captain Fleming there was no mention.

If there had been anxious moments about the eighteenth of June at Manchester, you may judge what the feelings of the two girls were when the wire flashed home the news, and the various papers announced in their largest type: "The Fall of Sebastopol," knowing as they did too well the terrible postscript that had to follow. Had it been possible Nell would have telegraphed at once to the regiment for reliable information, but the submarine cable was reserved altogether for official despatches, as indeed was absolutely necessary. There were too many people at home who in their solicitude for friends and relatives in the Crimea would have used that cable regardless of expense; wealthy people too at that time would have spent money freely only to have had the very latest news from the Crimea. No war we have engaged in since has excited such feverish interest in

England, until we come to the dramatic story of Wolseley's splendid dash across the desert to Khartoum, with its desperate fighting, and sad death roll—all ending in that melancholy wail, "Too late!"

That it was a terribly anxious time for Nell Lynden may be easily believed, and one thing that puzzled her much was, for the first time she did not know where her lover might be. When she had last heard from him he was doing duty as usual with the —th, but Miss Lynden had seen that gazette in which Hugh was promoted into the Grenadier Guards, even a little before it reached the Crimea. Her father, whose knowledge of the British army was as accurate as if he had passed some years of his life in it, and was familiar with all the details thereof, in reply to her questioning had informed her that an officer's promotion from one regiment to another involved his joining the regiment he was promoted to; that Captain Fleming would therefore join the Guards; and that

the Guards, in consequence of the terrible punishment they had endured at Inkermann and their sufferings during the winter, had been so reduced that they had been sent down to Balaklava and placed in reserve. Miss Lynden therefore clung to the fond hope that her lover was not actively engaged upon this occasion.

“ He has done enough, Frances, I’m sure ; and if he is only safe I’m sure it cannot signify his not being with the old regiment this time.”

To which Miss Smerdon made no reply. She could only think that the man who despised her, the man whom she never meant to see again, but whom, alas ! she still loved, was still at the front. Ah, was he still at the front ? And then the tears came into her eyes and she thought what wouldn’t she give, even to know that much.

Dr. Lynden showed an indifference about the return lists that made the two girls perfectly furious. As Miss Smerdon said :

“ We don’t expect our fathers to take quite the same interest in our lovers that we do ourselves, but darling Nell, your father really might have some little feeling for those he knew fairly well, such a few months ago.”

The lives of the combatants in the eyes of Dr. Lynden were as the loss of so many pawns in the game, save and except it should happen to be that of some combatant of mark. But as he had already said there were no Napoleons nowadays, and there was only one man engaged in the struggle whose value the Doctor appraised at a very high standard, and that was the intrepid Engineer who had so long defended Sebastopol. The Doctor’s mind at present was busy with conjectures as to where the second act would take place.

“ As for the north side,” he would say, “ it’s perfectly immaterial. I don’t suppose the Russians care whether we have it or they ; their fleet is sunk, we shall destroy their arsenal, blow in their docks, and Sebastopol is a thing of the past—*c’est fini*.”

But the grim returns are cabled home at last. And the two girls glance eagerly through the list until they come to the —th. The regiment was engaged quite as hotly as it had previously been in the Quarries, but fortune had favoured it on this occasion, and it had suffered far less severely both in officers and men. Two of the former only were wounded, and it was with a sense of intense relief that they saw no mention of the names of either Byng or Fleming. Then they turned to the general account of the capture of the place, of which, though the reports were as yet meagre, there were still quite sufficient to make one long to learn the whole story of the finish of the great drama which had been so long enacted before it. Suddenly Miss Smerdon, who was now in entire possession of the paper, uttered a low cry, and gasped out :

“ Oh, Nell, Nell, my darling, I am so sorry for you.”

Frances' eye had once more reverted to the

list of killed and wounded, and at the bottom of this she saw what had before escaped their eyes—

“We regret to say that Captain Fleming, of the Grenadier Guards, is among the missing.”

Nell Lynden turned very white, and her lips twitched a little; but, more habituated to self-control than her emotional friend, she only held out her hand, and said quietly, though her voice shook a little :

“Give me the paper.”

Placing her finger on the fatal line, Frances handed it to her in silence.

For a moment Nell gazed at the paragraph half-vacantly, as one who did not understand its meaning, and this in truth she did not. She was trying to think what “missing” meant. Why did they not know where he was? If he were killed, if he were wounded, surely someone must know. Could it mean that he was a prisoner? No, hardly that, she thought; since Inkermann it had so rarely

happened that officers had been made prisoners on either side, not from any barbarous reasons of refusing quarter, but simply it had happened so.

“What does it mean?” she asked, at last.

But Miss Smerdon could only reply, with tears, that she did not know, and “missing” must mean “missing.”

Then Nell reflected what her father had told her, that Hugh would at once have to join his new regiment ; and again she glanced at the brief story of the assault contained in the paper she held in her hand. Yes, her father was right, it mentioned that the Guards and Highlanders, though marched up to the front, had been held in reserve during the 8th of September. It must be a mistake ; the next mail would probably bring a letter from Hugh, and make her laugh over her fears. Surely, after preserving him through so much danger, God could not be so cruel as to take her lover from her on the last day of that terrible siege. She never reflected that

such sorrow must be the lot of many a woman in England who had read the returns that day.

But that next mail brought no letter from Hugh, and then, heart-sick with terrible anxiety, Nell Lynden wrote for news to Major Byng. She had nerved herself now for the worst. She knew some disaster must have befallen Hugh, or he would never have failed to scrawl a note after such a battle as the last. She shed no tears; she made no outward moan; she even shrank from speculating over Hugh's probable fate with her friend. But her face wore that look of sternly repressed trouble which is far more touching in a woman than lamentation and tears. As for these latter, Frances in her sympathy shed quite enough, one might indeed have supposed that Hugh was her lover instead of only her friend's. But the next mail brought a letter from the Crimea to Miss Lynden, directed in a hand which, though she failed to recognise, brought the

blood to Miss Smerdon's temples when she saw it.

"DEAR MISS LYNDEN," it ran.

"Knowing exactly how things stand between you and Hugh Fleming, I feel sure you will be distressed at not hearing from him last mail. I have waited to write to you till this in the hope that I might have good news to send and set your mind at ease. But I am very, very sorry to say that we know nothing of Hugh nor of what has befallen him. He took a last turn with the old regiment on the 8th, and was one of the foremost into the Redan. He was there during the whole of that bitter struggle which resulted, as the papers no doubt have already told you, in our being kicked out, solely for want of reinforcements. I saw him and spoke to him myself several times during the fight inside that work, but the last man as far as we can make out who actually saw him was a private soldier called Peter Phybbs, who

declares that he was then fighting desperately with half-a-dozen Russians. He is a protégé of your own, Miss Lynden, says that he is a brother of your maid, and that Hugh saved his life that day. I have told him to write a full account of it all to his sister, thinking that he will write to her with far less restraint than if I told him to address yourself. I can only say that Hugh's fate at present is involved in mystery. He certainly was not amongst the killed or wounded found in the Redan and round it. He was not in the hospitals at Sebastopol which the Russians were compelled to abandon in their retreat, and I still don't despair of his once more turning up. The obvious conclusion one ought to come to is that he has been taken prisoner, but to be quite candid with you it is singular in that case that we have not heard from him, as the enemy always allow a prisoner to write to his friends and give particulars of his misfortune. Still the exigencies of their sudden retreat may

have prevented all this. Deeply regretting I have nothing more satisfactory to tell you, and pledging myself to write as soon as ever I receive tidings of Hugh,

Yours very sincerely,

THOMAS BYNG.

“Camp before Sebastopol, Sept. 14th.”

CHAPTER II.

POLLY CHANGES HER MIND.

SERGEANT EVANS is getting extremely interested in the study of Dr. Lynden's life. He is very doubtful as to coining being the Doctor's vocation; he would not as yet say positively that it was not so, but he certainly did not much believe that he was engaged in that. As for the lady of the roses, she seemed at present to almost live upon the railway between Manchester and London. She was more capricious as to the colour of the roses in her bonnet than ever, but she was still constant to that mode of decoration. So faithful was she to her walks in the direction of the Doctor's house that they soon attracted the attention of Miss Phybbs. She recognised the lady in an instant, and noticed the

perpetual change of colour in the rose in her head-gear, nearly as quickly as the detective had done. As for Constable Tarrant, unless he had seen the lady come out of the side door it would never have occurred to him that it was odd her walking so continually in that direction. In short, Police-Constable Tarrant was by this heartily sick of the whole thing, and would long since have given up keeping his eye on the Doctor but for the commands of his superiors. There was very little perseverance about Richard Tarrant, and advantage must accrue speedily to induce him to stick to any pursuit. At present his watch was of a very perfunctory nature and, so far, had only been rewarded by his seeing some one or two men go in and out of the side door, whose status it would have been rather difficult to decide about. The Doctor indeed had fairly baffled his inquisitors, and though weeks, even months, had elapsed since Tarrant first decided that an eye must be kept upon him, he and Phybbs had learnt but

very little. Sergeant Evans, albeit a skilled detective, had learnt little more, and though still pursuing the inquiry, was doing it now with no expectation of discovering crime, but more because the elucidation of the problem piqued him. To the Sergeant, a mystery he could not penetrate had all the fascination that a stiff double acrostic has for some people.

One morning, about the end of September, when Miss Smerdon came down to breakfast, she was surprised to notice signs of agitation in her usually calm, self-possessed young hostess, which she at once concluded were caused by news from the Crimea. She timidly ventured to express as much, for Frances lived in dread that all this stern repression must end in a frightful burst of feeling whenever the cruel news did come. Of Hugh Fleming's fate there were no tidings. No letter came from Byng; the papers regretted ever and anon that no intelligence had come to hand regarding the missing

officer, and spoke in a hopeless fashion of his ever being heard of again alive.

Miss Smerdon herself had little doubt that if ever Hugh Fleming was discovered it would be amongst the ruins and *débris* of the captured town, and, alas! probably only to be recognised by his uniform. However, Miss Lynden assured her that it was nothing of the kind; still there was a slight embarrassment perceptible in Nell's manner which caused Frances to wonder what had disturbed her equanimity. Dr. Lynden, not an unusual thing with him, was absent at breakfast. At length Miss Lynden said, "I hope you won't think me very rude and inhospitable, Frances, if I ask you to go home at very short notice. The truth is, my father has just received news that obliges him to leave this at once, and he wishes to take me with him."

Frances was not a little surprised, but at once replied :

"Of course I will, I'll go to-day if I can. I've paid you an unconscionable visit; it has

been very good of you indeed to bear with me for the last three months."

"No, no, it isn't that," said Miss Lynden, "I don't want you to go to-day, and above all I must ask you to say nothing about your going till to-morrow morning. You got no letters to-day, remember; to-morrow I will take care you receive one. It will be your excuse for so suddenly returning home. I am awfully sorry, Frances, and I know I am seeming very unkind, but I can't help it. Papa says we must go, and I know no more about it."

"Not another word, Nell, I'm sorry to leave, very sorry, to leave you in your sore trouble, and you were so good to me in mine. You say but little, still, I can see how you suffer, one don't speak of such things. You know my secret—well, I never said anything more to you about it, and am not going to now. All is over between us, but thank God, he is safe. Ah, if we could only hear the same of Hugh Fleming."

Miss Lynden's stoical composure somewhat gave way, and it was in unsteady tones that she replied :

“We must both wait and hope, Frances, for I have a firm conviction that your love affair will all come right in the end.”

Miss Smerdon shook her head, though a thrill of exultation shot through her breast at the suggestion.

“As for me,” continued the girl, “I must still hope, though judging from what I see here,” and she pointed to the paper, “I am hoping against hope.”

It was a rather melancholy day that last. It was not likely that conversation between the two friends could be anything but of the most sombre description. Each felt that in leaving Manchester they were cutting themselves off from all direct intelligence from the Crimea, and would have to depend for their news on the daily papers. Miss Lynden, it is true, might write to Major Byng, but she had now no address to give him. When she en-

quired of her father as to where letters were to be forwarded to them, he replied sharply :

“ We shall have no address for the present. You have not very many correspondents, and you had better let them know that such is the case. Anything that arrives here will have to remain till our return, which is a very indefinite period. I shall be busy all day in the laboratory ; remember we start to-morrow morning early.”

Although the two girls strictly conformed to the Doctor's injunctions and made no allusion to their approaching departure before Phybbs, yet they naturally commenced preparations for their different journeys. It was not to be supposed that these escaped the observation of the lynx-eyed Polly, who was sorely exercised in her mind as to what it behoved her to do upon this occasion. Their all going away without saying a word to anyone she felt quite certain Dick would look upon as suspicious. She could not but admit it was, herself ; she did not believe that

the Doctor was engaged in coining, or in any nefarious transaction, but then the police did, or else why had they told Dick to keep an eye upon him? And Constable Tarrant had taken care, with a good deal of swagger and conceit, to inform her that that was the case. He forgot to mention that with a view of showing his own intelligence he had told his superiors that he had made up to one of the servant girls in the house, and that nothing took place in the Doctor's residence of which he was not informed. Sergeant Evans placed very little confidence in his subordinate, but he certainly under those circumstances did not think the Doctor could make any preparations for departure without its coming to his knowledge. He had no reason to suppose that the Doctor had any intention of leaving, and as we know was now continuing his investigation more from curiosity than from any belief that he was engaged in felonious pursuits.

Phybbs' breast was torn with conflicting

emotions. Suppose the police should prove right after all, and that after his escape the Doctor should turn out to be a felon who through her connivance had slipped through their fingers? What would Dick say to her? He would declare that his chance had come, that the opportunity of giving valuable information to his superiors had been his, and that, thanks to her keeping what she knew to herself, he had missed it. Then what did this hurried departure mean? If the Doctor was carrying on an intrigue, and had finally made up his mind to run away with the lady of the roses, he certainly would not take his daughter with him—no, she supposed the police must be right, women constantly stood in the dock along with men, the lady of the roses was probably only a confederate in crime, she was sorry for her master, but she had a public duty to perform. And then came the practical part of the argument, that if she failed to do it, Dick would give her a pretty hard time. Yes, she would ask for leave to go out

for an hour that evening, slip down and see Dick, and tell him what she knew.

Something occurred that afternoon which entirely changed Polly's resolve, and that was the arrival of the Crimean mail, bringing a letter for Miss Phybbs, c/o Dr. Lynden, etc., etc., and as she looked at it, Polly recognised her brother's caligraphy. It was not very often she heard from him, for, although Peter was a fairly expert penman, soldiers in the field have not much facility for letter-writing. If Polly had not been quite as anxious as the young ladies, she had certainly felt very uneasy and uncomfortable when news came of desperate fighting in the Chersonese. She was fond of her brother, and a housemaid and her mistress feel pretty much alike on these occasions. She had not heard from him since the 8th of September, but regarded him as safe, as his name did not figure among the returns of the —th on that day.

Miss Lynden was naturally of a reticent

disposition, and in the agony of her own grief had never told Polly what she had learnt from Byng's letter. Miss Phybbs felt satisfied that her brother was safe, but she had no idea that he owed his life to anything but the fortune of war. Peter's letter told her the whole story.

It is not worth producing, but the following extract will give Private Phybbs' idea of his share in the day.

"Well, Polly, you see, I've been shot at a good deal in the trenches since I've been out, but this was my first go in at the Rooshuns, real hand-to-hand, and if I don't know what fighting means now, I never shall. Some of the old soldiers say it was as hot as ever they seed it. It was just about mid-day when we got the order to go and take the Redan. I made up my mind to stick close to the Captain. He had been very good to me ever since I came out, and as I reckoned we were all bound to be killed, I thought we might as

well be killed together. How we got across the open I don't know. Men went down like skittles, but somehow nothing touched the Captain and me, and the next I know was we were in the ditch of the Redan, and the Captain going up a ladder like a squirrel. Well, we blundered up the ladder after him as we best could; he must have cleared the way a bit for us, for I know I had time to get down into the work before I was hand-to-hand with the Rooshuns. We was at it hammer and tongs then for I don't know how long; every now and then we'd stop for a bit, and then go at it again worse than ever; but, you see, they kept on getting more men, and we didn't, and so we was bound to be licked in the end. After we had been fighting for ever so long, they made a great rush. My foot slipped, down I went, and it would have been all over with me then and there if the Captain hadn't cut in and fought the lot of 'em while I got up again.

“ Well, I can't tell you much more about

it. They were too many for us. The last I saw of the Captain he was in the middle of a lot of Rooshuns fighting like a madman. It ain't no use, Polly, saying I ought to have gone back and helped him, I couldn't, none of us could, they drove us back and bundled us over the parapet neck and crop, and very lucky for those that were bundled over the parapet, those that were not were killed and wounded. I heard the Adjutant say it was bad enough, but we'd got out of it cheap considering, but the worst of it is, we can hear nothing of Captain Fleming. They can't find him, dead or alive, and I think he must be a prisoner, though it's very odd none of the officers have heard from him.

“Please give my duty to Miss Lynden, and say if it hadn't been for the note she gave me, I should have never written you this.”

The perusal of this letter caused a complete reversal of Polly's plans. How could she hand the father over to the police, when the

daughter's lover had saved her brother's life? and as it seemed to Polly, at her young mistress' intervention. No, it was a sore struggle, but if Dick should upbraid her on the one hand, what on the other should she say to her brother if it should turn out that her treachery had delivered Dr. Lynden into the clutches of the law?

The first thing Miss Phybbs did was to rush breathlessly to the drawing-room, and with flushed face pour forth her gratitude to her young mistress for the note she had given her, then to place her brother's letter in Miss Lynden's hand, and then to subside into helpless confusion as the thought flashed across her that the latter carried no comfort to her mistress but only recalled her own sorrow to her mind. Nellie flushed a little as she remembered how she had forgotten to tell Polly all this before. But the two ladies really were much interested in the account Private Phybbs gave of the assault on the

Redan, although it was not exactly news to them.

Dismissed with a few kindly words Polly had no longer any doubt of the course she should pursue. She would not lift a finger in the interests of the police. If Dr. Lynden had urgent reasons for getting out of the way she most certainly would not mar his plans. She could only hope, for his own sake, that the police were mistaken, but she should require neither bonnet nor shawl that evening.

CHAPTER III.

THE' LYNDENS LEVANT.

ALTHOUGH Polly Phybbs herself was not surprised, her fellow servants were, when immediately after post time Miss Lynden announced that she and Dr. Lynden were going up to Town for some days. Miss Phybbs, cognisant of the preparations that were going on the day before, was quite prepared for this, but what she was not prepared for, was that Nellie, in accordance with her father's instructions, should not only pay up their wages but further a quarter in advance, and that when, the cabs being at the door, she ventured to ask her mistress where letters were to be forwarded to, Miss Lynden should reply that such letters as might come could wait, that their plans were still unformed, and that

she would let her know where to forward them as soon as they were settled.

At the station they separated, Miss Smerdon returning to Monmouthshire, and the Doctor and his daughter taking a train to London. Frances was really very much distressed at parting with her friend, she did not understand it all, but she had a vague idea that something dreadful had happened and that there was more trouble in store for Nell Lynden. Of what description she could not conjecture, but what could be the meaning of this sudden and mysterious journey? Nell herself had said more than once that she neither knew why nor where they were going, and then Miss Smerdon's thoughts wandered, as they were rather given to do, off to the Crimea, and she wondered after all if it were possible that that was their destination. Could it be that the Doctor, moved by the trouble in his daughter's face, had suddenly determined to take her out to the East, and see if they could discover what had become

of Hugh Fleming? Dr. Lynden, she knew, was an excellent linguist, not only perfectly *au courant* with the Continent but also with singularly comprehensive knowledge of the Chersonese and adjoining countries. Had he been only more sympathetic on the subject of Nell's engagement, she would have felt certain that was the solution of the mystery, but he had always shown himself so utterly indifferent to it that, only Nell had assured her to the contrary, she would have thought him unaware that it existed. He hardly ever mentioned Fleming's name, and then it was in quite as casual a manner as that of any other of the officers of the regiment he had known during their stay in Manchester.

“No,” thought Frances, “the Doctor's very wise and very clever, he's fond of Nell in his way and he's very kind to me. But he's as selfish an old thing as ever I met with, and it's my private conviction that he not only wouldn't care, but he'd rather prefer not to see Hugh Fleming again. He's an

active and energetic man enough, and if he seems to live a lazy life at Manchester, it's not from natural indolence, but I don't think he'd make a pilgrimage to find Hugh Fleming, and if it is not that, what on earth is it? The thing that seems to interest him most, now that hostilities have virtually ceased in the Crimea, is where they are to commence again. How I wish I knew what they were all about out there. If one could but see what they were all doing." And then Miss Smerdon became guiltily conscious that this general anxiety about the doings of the Crimean army was a rather garbled statement of her desires; and that what Major Byng might be about, and what had become of Hugh Fleming, would have amply satisfied her curiosity.

"My darling Nell," she murmured, "I do trust things will all come right in the end for you; but it will be dreadful not to hear from you—not even to know where you are."

The day after the Doctor's departure

Police-constable Tarrant was informed, previous to going on duty, that he was wanted in the chief office. Police-constable Tarrant prepared to obey the summons with no little discomposure. His interviews with his superiors so far had generally resulted in somewhat sharp strictures upon his conduct, and he felt dubious as to whether commendation was likely to be his lot upon this occasion. However, in compliance with the order he made his way thither, and found the Chief Constable and Sergeant Evans sitting in conclave.

“Tarrant,” said the Chief, “your instructions have been for some time past to keep an eye upon Dr. Lynden’s house. Have you anything special to report concerning it?”

“Nothing,” replied Dick. “I’ve mentioned that two or three suspicious characters had gone in at that very suspicious side door during the last month.”

“Yes,” replied the Chief; “quite so, you mentioned that,” and here he threw a signi-

ficant glance at Sergeant Evans. "By the way, you weren't on the beat yesterday?"

"No, sir," rejoined Dick.

"That wouldn't matter much to Tarrant, sir," remarked Evans, with an amused though wicked look in his eyes. "He has exceptional means of knowing all that goes on in that house. Never mind, my man," he continued, as Dick looked apprehensively at the Chief and evidently waxed very uncomfortable, "I'm not going to betray confidences, men of the world don't talk of these little affairs. The day before yesterday you were on duty there—you neither heard of nor noticed anything unusual going on in the family?"

"No," was the reply.

"That will do, Tarrant," said the sergeant suavely, "you can't do better than continue to keep an eye upon Dr. Lynden's, and I shouldn't wonder if we had to take you on the detective staff before long," and there was a ring of irony in the concluding

sentence that penetrated even Dick's armour of conceit.

Police-constable Tarrant felt an uncomfortable conviction that there was something wrong somewhere, and as he started for his beat, resolved to call at the house and tell Polly he must see her. By the time he had carried out his intention the Doctor had been gone four-and-twenty hours. Miss Phybbs opened the door for him in person, and started with no little dismay upon seeing who the visitor was. She knew that it must come, and she had made up her mind to it, but she felt sure that Dick would be very angry that he had not been informed of the Doctor's departure yesterday. She was a plucky and a high-spirited young woman till it came to confronting her cousin Dick, but when he railed at her she would merely hang her head and make no reply. What she saw in him—why she should bear tamely from him what she would stand from no one else, was inexplicable to all her friends; but it can

only be said it was so. After all there is nothing new in it. Clever and pretty women from time immemorial for reasons inscrutable have allowed themselves to be bullied by mean and contemptible men.

“How are you, Polly?” said Dick. “You must manage to slip out for half-an-hour as soon as you can. I want to talk to you badly.”

“Well, Dick, you can talk here as well as anywhere. Won’t you come in? There’s nobody at home.”

“What do you mean?” asked Dick, with eyes open wide from astonishment. “You don’t mean I’m to come in, do you?”

He had never ventured yet to cross the Doctor’s threshold.

“Yes, I do. They are all gone away—they went away yesterday morning,” said Polly, setting her face hard in anticipation of the storm that was coming.

“Gone away!” thundered Dick. “What’s the use of your keeping an eye on them I

should like to know, if you allow them to go away ? ”

“ Why, how could I prevent it ? ”

“ Prevent, indeed ! ” said the now angry Tarrant. “ Why, they couldn’t go away without your seeing them, I suppose. Wasn’t it clearly your duty to communicate with me ? You don’t suppose the law would allow them to go away, do you ? ”

“ I’m sure I don’t know,” replied Polly meekly. “ They told us suddenly yesterday morning that they were going to Town, and in two or three hours they went. They kept me pretty busy too, all the time. How was I to let you know ? ”

It could hardly be expected that Polly would own that she had been pretty well convinced of their intentions twenty-four hours before that.

“ Bah ! ” returned Constable Tarrant. “ I’m disgusted with you. I looked upon you as a gal with gumption, and any gal with gumption would have known they were going away

long before. But that's the way with all you women. You're all idleness, vanity and conceit. Instead of keeping your eye on the Doctor you were keeping it on your looking-glass. Instead of thinking of my interests you were thinking about the colour of your bonnet strings."

"Indeed, Dick—indeed, they gave us no notice," said the girl, pleadingly.

"Oh, go away; it just makes me sick. All the men I used to read about when I was at school was always brought to grief by women. Now you've just gone and ruined my prospects, and I hope you're satisfied."

It is not very likely that Mr. Tarrant's prospects were impaired by his not having conveyed the meditated departure of the Doctor to his superiors. He was a man of that kind that may be considered meritorious if they only succeed in retaining the position in life in which they started.

"No, Polly, I've stuck to you through thick

and thin, although I've known all along as you weren't a woman calculated to help a fellow along in the world, but this settles it. I cast you off now for ever."

There was one part of Mr. Tarrant's speech which was undoubtedly true. He had stuck to Polly for some years, and it would have been very much to that young woman's advantage if he had not. Now her opportunity had come. He offered her release, but do you suppose that he thought, any more than you or I do, that she would take advantage of it; that she would recognise that she was well quit of a lazy, worthless, contemptible hound? Not she. She did just as such women will, she clung to this worthless idol of hers from what can be only adequately described as "sheer cussedness." She shed tears and implored Dick to forgive her, and Police-constable Tarrant, after bullying her for half an hour, finally condescended to kiss, forgive, and borrow half a sovereign from her, and then

stalked forth to resume his official duties, and actually ruminate over whether Sergeant Evans was aware of the Doctor's departure.

Sergeant Evans had acquired his information by sheer accident, an acquaintance who happened to have witnessed the Doctor's exodus, mentioning it as a bit of casual gossip, and the Sergeant was quite aware that he had no grounds whatever for interfering with him in any way. The man was eccentric—an enigma, if you like; but Evans could not honestly say that he suspected him to be a coiner. He had no earthly right to search the Doctor's residence, but he felt that it would be a great satisfaction to him if he could have a look through that laboratory of which Constable Tarrant had given such a glowing description.

It is true that Constable Tarrant had never seen it, but that did not hinder him from giving a fictitious account of it, and the difficulty he had about obtaining admittance. He thought it advanced him in the eyes of his

superiors, and showed zeal and intelligence in the performance of his duty.

It was merely a whim, the Sergeant thought, as he turned the thing over in his mind ; but still it was a whim it should be easy to gratify. He had already a suspicion that Mr. Tarrant's accuracy was not quite to be depended on, but if there was a young woman in the house who was a bit sweet upon him, he ought surely to have no difficulty in persuading her to let himself and a friend have a peep into the mysterious chamber.

“ Workshop of a great chemist—the sanctum of a celebrated man ! and all that sort of flummery. Myself a disciple—humble admirer of the famous Dr. Lynden. Yes, that's the caper. Tarrant's not very bright, but he surely ought to have no difficulty in working that. It isn't business, I know ; but we've all our weaknesses, and I really am curious to know what's the Doctor's little game.”

The Sergeant lost no time in explaining

to Dick what he expected of him, and in a few days, by a judicious mixture of coaxing and bullying, that worthy had extorted a promise from Phybbs that she would allow them to look into the laboratory, upon the condition that they didn't pull things about. To this, Dick willingly pledged himself, and at once informed his superior officer of his success. Miss Phybbs' time being now at her own disposal, it was settled that they should proceed to the Doctor's house the next day, and there Polly received them, and was favoured with a somewhat fervid rhapsody on her master's transcendent talents, by Sergeant Evans. Rigidly as the Doctor had kept the door of the laboratory locked while at home, it had struck Polly as singular that he should have left the key almost ostentatiously on his dressing-table on leaving. She led the way and the two men followed her. Tarrant felt confident that they were on the verge of discoveries, and that Evans' practised eye would speedily seize upon in-

dications of coining. Polly threw open the door, and Tarrant, to whom the fittings of a laboratory presented themselves for the first time, had no doubt that his suspicions were fully confirmed, and that all the necessities for coining on a large scale met his gaze. He was about to appeal to the Sergeant, when a prompt frown warned him to hold his tongue. Evans, in his assumed character of a profound admirer of the great man, throwing himself into a quaint arm-chair, requested them not to speak to him.

Tarrant meanwhile went fussing about, peering into crucibles, peeping into retorts, and poking his nose into drawers, under the profound impression that he was playing the detective officer to the life. The Sergeant never moved from his chair, but his restless eyes roved incessantly round the room. His lip curled contemptuously as he thought, "What an old fool I am ! coining ; there's not a sign of it. Why on earth should one imagine that he was other than what he

professed—a man with a fad for chemistry, and who is occasionally visited by friends with similar tastes? Never recollect hearing, though, of a lady addicted to smart bonnets being given that way. Odd! To be sure it's no business of mine," and here his eye fell upon the empty grate, where it was apparent a considerable number of letters and papers had been recently burnt; some few indeed yet remained. The officer rose from his chair, and seeing that his companions were too occupied with each other to notice him, picked up the half-burnt papers and slipped them into his pocket; and then, quietly returning to his seat, once more let his eyes rove round the apartment.

Polly was far too deeply interested in Dick's investigations to think of anything else. He had told her that the crucibles, etc., were all conclusive evidence of the manufacture of spurious money.

"Yes," he said, "all we want to do now is to find two or three bits of bad money, and

then the case is complete ; and it will be I, Constable Richard Tarrant, who will have led to the conviction of the most notorious coiner of the day."

"Lor," said Polly, "I should never have guessed what all these pots and bottles were for ; but he don't seem much interested, Dick," and she cast a look towards the Sergeant, who had risen from his chair, and strolled towards the writing table, a waste paper basket standing near which had attracted his attention. On seeing that he was observed, the Sergeant, presumably in his confusion, dropped his hat, and when he had recovered it, the few torn letters that the basket contained were no longer there.

Evans now seemed to have worshipped sufficiently at the shrine of the great man for whom he expressed such reverence, and thanking Polly profusely for having admitted him to the workshop of the famous Dr. Lynden, intimated that it was time to go. Tarrant knew better than not to promptly

respond to his superior's hint, and having taken leave of Miss Phybbs, the pair were quickly in the street.

"Pretty strong that," quoth Constable Tarrant, exultingly, "I should think there's enough evidence there to convict——"

"You, of being the biggest fool in the force," quoth Sergeant Evans, with more brevity than politeness, and with that he left Mr. Tarrant to his own reflections.

CHAPTER IV.

WINTER QUARTERS.

THE great siege was over, and the Army, like the Doctor, was speculating and wondering what next. One thing seemed pretty clear, that the belligerents who were round Sebastopol both desired repose after the tremendous struggle of the last twelve months. It was pretty confidently believed that, although there might be no armistice, there would certainly be no further hostilities until the spring came round again.

Our old friends the —th had left the lines they had lived in so long, and marched down to join the newly-formed second brigade of the Highland Division which was occupying the Vanoutka Pass. What a change it was, and how they all revelled in it, after the hot, dusty plateau! To sit outside the huts here

and smoke, and look down the gorge, thickly wooded with scrub, which led to the glittering waters of the Black Sea; or to get on the ponies, canter through the Pass, and picnic in the lovely valley of Baidar, and reflect how hard it was upon the luckless Tartars who had to evacuate their pretty village therein—all that was luxury. There were no trenches nowadays. As Tom Byng remarked:

“It seems as if we’d all come up here for the holidays, and had nothing to do but to enjoy ourselves.”

To a regiment worked as this had been, such easy work as road making or carrying up boards and stores over the hill from Balaklava, was child’s play. They were in the early days of October now—bright, clear, sunshiny days, with just that touch of crispness in the air which always characterises the “chill” month of the year. What bathing parties there were after parade, to ride down that rugged gorge and take a header into the Euxine. How those recreants who voted it

was getting too cold were chaffed and chivied into their huts, only to reappear with their towels in compliance with popular opinion. There was little fear of the army not having a good time this winter. Stores there were in abundance, not a regiment that did not bid fair to be well hutted before the winter set in, and as for kit, it looked as if each British soldier would require a bullock trunk to himself whenever it came to moving again. Filled with remorse for the sufferings the army had undergone the first winter, the nation were determined that there should be no recurrence of such in the second. They had perhaps gone rather into the opposite extreme, and the private soldier was served out with what his officers speedily determined to be an unfortunate superfluity of clothing. In grateful acknowledgment of the care they were taking of him the soldier had a knack of putting *all* his warm clothing on at once, and when a man is encumbered with a fur-lined jacket, a great coat, and a waterproof over

all, he is not so useful on a working party as he might be. A wonderful find, too, had occurred to the —th. They had discovered, in the gorge before mentioned, two large wood stacks of cedar, all chopped up into logs suitable for firewood. All the previous winter the ground had been in the possession of the Russians, and it had presumably been cut and stacked by them, and abandoned when they withdrew their troops and ceased any longer to menace Balaklava.

Tom Byng, who occupies a hut slightly detached from what might be designated the "Officers' Barracks," is smoking a pipe in front of his dwelling, in all the abandon of his shirt sleeves, when his attention is roused by the sound of his name being freely bandied about in the huts just below. Glancing that way, he sees a Cossack with long lance and a wiry little steed, and wonders not a little how he came there. He certainly didn't come down the pass, or he should have seen him ; he must have come up the road from Kamara.

Next it becomes evident from the shouts of his brother officers that the business of the Cossack is with himself. Tom accordingly walks down towards the mess hut, but the easiness of his attire makes the Cossack doubtful as to his being a field officer of the British Army. Reassured, however, by some of those more correctly attired, he salutes and hands Tom a letter in a woman's handwriting.

"How the deuce did he come here?" asked Tom of his brother officers as he took the missive.

"Well, he must have come down Mackenzie's Heights," said one of them, "for he's got a safe conduct from the commanding officer of the Sardinians on Traktir Bridge. There is nobody can make him understand a word we say, though we've tried him in all the tongues we know, we even had Mickey Flinn up to act as interpreter," continued the speaker laughing, "on the strength of his having declared our friend there to be a

Kerry man. However, his mission apparently is to bring you that note."

Tom tore it open, glanced hastily over it, and then gave a loud hurrah!

"Here you are, you fellows," he exclaimed, "the best bit of news that's come our way for ever so long. Hugh Fleming's all right; at least when I say all right he's alive and there's a hope he'll pull through. Here you, Flinn," he continued, singling out Mickey from a group of soldiers who were watching the proceedings from a respectful distance, "I don't know whether he's a Kerry man or not, but give him something to eat and drink and take care of him," and the Cossack quickly interpreting the signs that meat and drink awaited him, resigned himself at once to the charge of Mickey Flinn and his comrades. Tom then turned into the mess hut, followed by three or four of his brother officers.

"Fleming don't write himself," said Brydon, "it's not his hand-writing surely?"

"No," replied Tom, "my correspondent is

a lady. I'll read you her letter. She writes in French, which though I can't speak I can read."

"October 4th.

"MONSIEUR,—I write at the request of Captain Fleming, of your regiment, to inform you that we now hope he will do well. He was badly wounded in the last terrible day of the siege, a day the horrors of which I shall never forget, should I live to be a hundred. Like many other ladies, I have devoted myself to nursing the wounded, but ah, Monsieur! on that dreadful day, what could we do? Our streets were strewn with the dead and dying, our hospitals were full to overflowing. In the retreat which followed some of our wounded were sent across the harbour, and some were sent to Batchi Serai. Ah, such a terrible march! and it was pitiful to see how our poor patients suffered. Amongst them was Captain Fleming, and the uniform told me he belonged to the same

regiment as yourself. It was enough--a life for a life. I had vowed weeks before that if ever anyone of that regiment fell to my care, if devoted nursing could save him he should have it.

“Ah, Monsieur, I owe you a great deal of gratitude, and, for your sake, the whole of your gallant corps. You saved the life of my only brother—you robbed him of the results of his daring enterprise, but you saved his life. Captain Fleming has hovered between life and death for weeks, but our doctors now hold forth hopes. It will be my pride to restore him to you cured, when our rulers permit. He will write to you himself as soon as he is able, but he is too weak to hold a pen at present.

“Accept, Monsieur, the profoundest assurances of my gratitude and friendship,

“Yours very faithfully,

“MARIE IVANHOFF.”

“Well,” said Brydon, as Byng finished,

“I’m awfully glad Hugh Fleming is alive and likely to get all right again. You seem to have unwittingly done him a good turn in saving Ivanhoff’s life, whoever he may be. Do you recollect anything about it?”

“Oh, yes,” said Tom; “I never knew his name, but the writer of this can only be the sister of the spy I took that day in the advance. I remember now he enquired particularly what my name was before he was marched off to head-quarters.”

“I suppose they’ve got him in prison somewhere down at Constantinople,” said Brydon.

“I fancy so,” said Byng. “I only know that he was shipped off from this to be detained as a prisoner.”

“Fleming’s very fortunate,” said the surgeon of the regiment, who had been listening to the discussion. “We have seen what the inside of Sebastopol is like: the place literally reeks of carnage. Any fellow badly wounded the last few days of the siege stood but a poor chance of pulling through there. Batchi

Serai I believe to be a charming place ; I only hope we shall have a chance of seeing it next spring."

"That'll depend, Doctor," said Brydon, with a quiet smile, "on how many of us get up Mackenzie Heights. The Russians will very likely set us a very stiff nut to crack there."

And then a lively discussion ensued as to in what direction the advance would be made next year, in the midst of which Tom Byng suddenly recollected that it was incumbent upon him to write a letter to Hugh, and also another of thanks to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, for all her care and attention, preparatory to the return of the warrior of the Don to his own people. These ready, the Cossack was soon discovered fraternising amazingly with the little knot of soldiers under the presidency of Mickey Flinn, and after grinning a farewell to his entertainers, departed in the direction of the Tchernaya with Tom's missives.

One of the first things that occurred to

Byng after his emissary had departed was that he must now write to Miss Lynden, and tell her about Hugh. He had rather expected to hear from that young lady, and singularly enough had been a little disappointed that he had not done so. Why he should be anxious to hear from Nellie, it would be hard to say, but that her letters usually contained some allusion to Frances Smerdon may perhaps account for it.

“They are all alike,” he muttered, puffing savagely at his pipe. “There’s Hugh, now he’s got a bit round, fretting his heart out about that girl, and she—well she’s apparently resigned and prepared for the worst. Shouldn’t wonder if she will feel as disappointed as Jim Lockwood vowed the regiment all were at my coming to life again. Daresay she thinks one sweetheart at home worth half-a-dozen in the Crimea. There, what a brute I am to go on abusing as nice a girl as ever I met. Don’t I know she’s been crying her eyes out about Hugh? I don’t know what’s come to me of

late. Getting sick of the whole beastly business I suppose, or else my liver's out of order. Now you fellows," he continued, addressing two or three of his brother officers who were lounging in front of the mess hut. "Who's for a canter to the Phoros Pass and back?"

Tom Byng's discontent with womankind would have been very much modified had he made a different reply to Miss Smerdon's note. Frances only wanted encouragement to open a very hot correspondence with Major Byng; but he was not very likely to hear from her, or even of her, again now. He couldn't guess that Miss Lynden and her father had disappeared from all knowledge of their old friends, and even that the letter he had just written to her was destined to be many a long day before it reached her hands. Indeed Tom Byng was fated to be kept in profound ignorance of all that was happening to his late friends, not only until he reached England, but even for some time afterwards. They had a glorious ride that afternoon,

through the valleys of Vanoutka and Baidar, right away through the quaint rocky arch which forms the Phoros Pass, till they stood on the winding road on the edge of the cliffs that leads to Aloutka, with the Black Sea shimmering in the light of the setting sun like a placid lake at their feet. Who could have thought to look at that now tranquil piece of water it could have wrought such wild work as it had last November, when it had thrown big ships about as if they had been corks, and sent the "Black Prince," crammed with urgently wanted stores, pitilessly to the bottom.

Then they turned the ponies about and rode homewards with an assurance very different from that of the bulk of the army the preceding October, to wit, that they would find a plentiful and comfortable dinner awaiting them.

"Well," said Tom Byng, as they entered the mess hut, "this is a considerable improvement from what we know our fellows had to go through last winter. Talk about campaign-

ing! It would trouble you to improve much upon this, even at home. Show me a mess-room in England where the sybarites have got a fireplace like that, and with cedar logs burning in it."

"Yes," said Brydon, "the room quite smells as if we were a disappointed sketching party burning our pencils. What's dining off silver to dining with such appetites as we've got? And then to think that we've done with all that confounded trench work."

"Yes," rejoined Tom, "whatever may be before us next spring, I devoutly hope we shan't be in for another siege. It's our first experience of the real thing, and we'll trust the fighting will take some other form in future."

The mess hut of the —th was indeed a noble apartment for a regiment in the field. Four officers' quarters had been thrown together to form it, and a large brick fireplace and chimney built in at one side. Grate there was none; this was a large open chim-

ney place such as you may see in old castles and country houses in England, meant only for the burning of wood, and therein flamed night and day two or three mighty cedar logs, which were constantly replenished ; for that fire was attended with as much devotion through the long winter as if it had been the sacred flame of a Parsee temple. Many were the banquets and revels that took place in that wooden hut.

If the regiment had not shared in the fasting of the previous winter they were well to the fore in the feasting of this, and an invitation to dine at the mess of the —th was a thing that quite warranted the rejection of most previous engagements. Stores were plenty at Balaklava, and they were no great distance from that place ; while the mess committee had thrown themselves heartily into their work, and developed a pretty taste for foraging of which they had hitherto been unsuspected.

The days draw in ; Christmas is creeping

upon them. The cold increases, and the first snowstorms come driving across the Steppes, as if to warn them that the last winter was by no means exceptional, but that the Crimean climate is as rigorous at that season as ever it is in England. But what are cold and snow to men with plenty to eat, lots of warm clothing, good fires and warm huts ?

Assuredly the Army made light of its troubles that winter. There were private theatricals and lots of entertainments that Christmas time. A popular man might find his engagement list as well filled as in the London season. The soldiers too waxed fat and healthy—the hospitals were almost empty ; and when Luders saw, as he did when the spring came round, those twenty-eight thousand Englishmen march past on the plateau of Sebastopol, he might well look with admiration on them. *They were all grit.* All the weakly stuff had died out of them ; what was left was the seasoned wood—the genuine article.

That the genuine article drank hard I am afraid must be admitted. I daresay they passed the wine cup pretty freely at Capua, at all events they did in the Crimea. British philanthropy, ever on the *qui vive*, was naturally very much exercised at this, and mooted several schemes for the more profitable expenditure of the soldiers' money. One philanthropic watch-maker indeed was so moved at these rumours that he suggested the superfluous pay of the soldier should be utilised for the purchase of one of his firm's silver lever mounted watches; but this proposal was not cordially met, though as one of the doggrel bards of the camp sang at the time :

“ Who can doubt of the chime
Of our marking time,
When it's done by a Jones' watch? ”

Perhaps the climate pulled them through, perhaps the healthiness of the life they led defied injury to the constitution, but at all events if they drank as hard as that famous

army of Flanders swore, they throve upon it, and were uncommonly healthy.

That he never got a line from Miss Lynden puzzled Tom Byng as the winter wore away ; but that he did not hear again from Hugh Fleming puzzled him still more, especially as he had once or twice taken advantage of a flag of truce going across the Russian lines, to forward a note to him.

CHAPTER V.

MADemoiselle IVANHOFF.

A LITTLE before Christmas an event had occurred which Dr. Lynden had foreseen as likely, and which he had predicted might count for a good deal in increasing the prospects of peace, should it happen. Kars had capitulated, its gallant defenders having at last been starved into submission. Mouravieff had clung to his prey with the tenacity of a bull-dog, and his perseverance had been at length rewarded. The utter failure of Omar Pasha to come to the relief of Sir Fenwick Williams gave cause to much angry feeling both at home and in the Crimea. There was a prevalent idea in the English army, that the defenders of Kars had been politically sacrificed, and that had the hands

of the Turkish General not been tied, the defence would not have been in vain, and that he could have compelled the Russians to raise the siege before the garrison were reduced to extremities. Be that as it may, the Russians could now, at all events, point to the capture of Kars as a set-off to the loss of Sebastopol. There are people to this day of that way of thinking, and who still believe that salve to Russia's honour had much to say to bringing the war to a conclusion.

With the spring came councils and congresses, much diplomacy, and many protocols, the first result of which was the conclusion of an armistice. With the spring, too, came much drilling and smartening up of regiments that perpetual trench duty had made slovenly of appearance. Field days on a large scale became of constant occurrence; and the whole army speedily resumed the appearance it might have worn had it been brought together in England, only with a workman-

like look about it that old campaigners could thoroughly appreciate. Advantage was taken of the armistice by officers on both sides to visit each other's lines, and here the English, thanks to the insatiable restlessness of their nation, speedily out-vied both their Allies and the Russians. The privilege was used sparingly by both the latter, but the British officer was emphatically "all over the place." He made his appearance at Batchi Serai, made pilgrimages to the scene of the battle of the Alma, he penetrated to the caves of Inkermann, and the limits of his travel seemed only bounded by the capabilities of a Crimean pony. As Brydon remarked, laughing, "no wonder our fellows are restless. We all feel as if we'd been strictly confined to our own parish for months. It's quite a luxury to break out and see how our neighbours get along."

"Just so," rejoined Byng, "and I tell you what it is, I vote we start for Batchi Serai to-morrow morning. We can go there and

back in a day if we start early and take it easy."

"Done with you," said Brydon, "it's a longish day for the ponies, but the wiry little brutes 'll do it easy enough. That dash of Barb blood they most of them have in their veins pulls them through."

So it was finally settled that what Byng called a reconnaissance should be made next day, and that those two should ride to Batchi Serai with a view to prospecting for an expedition on a considerably larger scale a week or two later.

"We'll make up a party, you know," said Tom, "half a dozen of us, get a week's leave, take up tents, servants and pack animals and make a big picnic of it."

"Capital," replied Brydon, "we're all cunning in camp life now, and we ought to have a splendid time. There's one thing, you can depend on the weather out here. When fine weather's due it's fine, though it can be nasty enough in the winter too."

“I wonder whether we shall pick up any news of Hugh Fleming in Batchi Serai, most of these Russian fellows speak French.”

“Which we don’t,” rejoined Brydon, laughing, “so that won’t much facilitate intercourse between us. But it don’t matter, Fleming’s doubtless been sent away far into the interior, or we should have heard from him before this. He’s as likely as not at St. Petersburg.”

A little after six the next morning the pair crossed the Traktir Bridge, and having cantered across the valley made their way up Mackenzie Heights. It was a lovely spring morning, and their ponies seemed to revel in the fresh air and sunshine to the full as much as their masters, and when they halted on the banks of the Belbek and produced from their haversacks materials for an early luncheon, Brydon declared he had never been so hungry in his life, while Tom said he felt more like a schoolboy home for the holidays than ever. After a brief halt, they resumed

their journey, and a little before noon entered the old capital of the Tartar kings. The first thing to find, undoubtedly, was an inn at which they could stay and rest their ponies. The unflinching little brutes had carried them well, but they had seven-and-twenty miles to carry them back, and required a good long bait before being called on to fulfil their task; as for their riders they had the town to see, such as it was. They were not long before they stumbled on one of those men who swarm all around the shores of the Mediterranean and Asiatic Turkey, men whose nationality it is impossible to define and who seem to speak, more or less, all the tongues of Europe. They are generally vaguely described as coming from the Levant, and from bankers to couriers, from restaurant waiters to promiscuous loafing and vagabondage, seem never at a loss about picking up a living. Some of them drive carriages, but many of them, like the man who so speedily became alive to the requirements of the two

British officers, seem, though never at a loss for a job, incapable of taking up with steady employment. Their self-constituted guide quickly found them a suitable inn, and then in obedience to their behests conducted them through the principal parts of the town. There seemed to have been a touch of the Moor about the old Mongolian race before they had succumbed to the hordes of the Muscovite, as evidenced by the verandahs of the houses and the large tree-shaded gardens in which they were built. You would have said it was a pretty town lying at the bottom of a valley, well sheltered from the bitter blasts of the Steppes, but nothing more. The old palace of the Khans, though in excellent repair, struck Byng and Brydon as hardly imposing enough a home for such powerful rulers as the Tartar princes had been in the heyday of their power. In the beautiful gardens around it, a Russian band was playing a set of German vales, while strolling about, or sitting on chairs, were numbers of

officers in every variety of uniform, from the Horse Artillery of the Imperial Guard down to the sturdy linesman. A few French uniforms also, with a tolerably good mixture of the English scarlet. A few ladies, richly dressed, were scattered about amongst the chairs, and evidently in great request with the *militaires* fortunate enough to be acquainted with them.

“Well,” said Brydon, “these fellows are all brushed up like ourselves. They show small signs of having been through such times as they must have had the last few weeks in Sebastopol.”

“Ho !” rejoined Byng, “here comes a poor fellow though, who still bears signs of having been well in the thick of it,” and as he spoke, a Russian officer, whose face bore traces of severe illness, limped past with the assistance of a stick, and raised his cap with grave courtesy to the two Englishmen. They speedily found themselves cordially received by their late enemies, who not only expressed

delight at seeing them but great regret at hearing that they were not to spend a few days there. One thing, however, a grey-headed colonel with a decidedly Kalmuck cast of countenance, insisted on, was that they should join him in a *ponche* after the music was finished.

“Ha! the *galope finale*,” remarked one of the other officers. The band struck up the “Stürm Marsch,” and Tom could hardly repress a slight start as the well-known air once more fell upon his ears. It recalled the night of that ball at Manchester, when he had first thought that he had good hopes of winning Frances Smerdon’s love. How the thought had grown stronger week by week during his stay in that place, and how before he had made up his mind to speak, the route had come, and he had determined that was no time for such nonsense. How he had sternly resolved that no love-making should escape his lips, but that he would sail for the East leaving the girl unfettered, and put his fate

to the test should he come safe home again. It was well, he thought, that he had made that decision when he first heard of Miss Smerdon's sarcastic remarks. He was not quite so sure about that now ; that letter she had written to him, when she thought he was seriously wounded, had made him take a more modified view of her conduct.

We know that he was sorry he had sent such an answer as he did to Frances' missive ; he was not at all certain that he had not made a confounded fool of himself by his Spartan reticence. You can't expect a girl to take the initiative in an affair of this kind.

“Do you suppose, sir,
That the rose, sir,
Picks itself to deck your breast ? ”

However, it is all over now, and here his reflections were suddenly interrupted by Brydon's ejaculating, “By Heavens, Tom, look there !” Following the direction of Brydon's gesture, Tom's eyes fell upon a pretty young lady, smartly dressed, with the

most coquettish of bonnets upon her head, who was exchanging salutations right and left with the Russian officers, and having for her cavalier no other than Hugh Fleming, looking as well as ever he had done in his life.

“Ah, Monsieur recognises some one,” said one of the Russians talking to Brydon, turning round. “Ah, yes, your compatriot, you know him I presume?”

“Yes, he belongs to my own regiment,” said Brydon, “he’s a *camarade*, a brother officer, what do you call it?—*frère* officer.”

“Ah, brother officer,” replied the Russian politely in English.

“Oh lord, Tom,” said Brydon in an undertone, “it’s very convenient but rather humiliating, all these fellows speak better English than we do.”

“Yes,” said Byng, “Captain Fleming is one of ourselves. May I ask who is the very pretty lady with whom he is walking?”

“That is Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. Captain Fleming has been very fortunate. Many of

us would have taken his wound to have so fair a nurse."

"Well, he certainly don't look as if he had anything the matter with him now," said Brydon.

"Oh, no," rejoined the Russian, "he's as well as any of us, but he's a prisoner on *parole*. *Ma foi*," he added with a slight sneer, "they need not have asked for his *parole*, Mademoiselle's chains would have been quite sufficient."

"Well, we must go across and shake hands with Hugh," said Byng. "Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, you said. I once had the honour of meeting her brother under rather peculiar circumstances."

"*Sacré tonnerre*," exclaimed the Russian, "then it was you who took Alexis Ivanhoff prisoner before the eyes of the whole army. It was *superbe*, *magnifique*, but I should think, Monsieur, the exploit would hardly recommend you to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff," and so saying, the Russian

slightly raised his hat and turned on his heel.

But by this, Hugh had caught sight of them, and was springing forward to meet them, when he was momentarily checked by his fair companion. Glancing at the English officers, she said something rapidly to him, and in another moment Hugh was cordially shaking hands with Byng and Brydon.

“By Jove,” he exclaimed, “how glad I am to see you fellows again! Of course you’ve heard all about me, how I was taken prisoner and should have died, I verily believe, if it hadn’t been for Marie—Mademoiselle Ivanhoff I mean, she called herself Sister Marie, you know,” he added, a little confusedly, “during the time she was a hospital nurse.”

“And you’re all sound again now,” said Brydon.

“Fit as a fiddle,” rejoined Hugh. “But come and be introduced to my kind nurse, she is very anxious to see you, Tom, as you may well imagine.”

Now this was just a point upon which Tom had considerable misgivings. He had had his doubts beforehand, even when he had read that letter of "Sister Marie's," and as he looked at the haughty, resolute face of the young lady, it struck him there was a strong dash of her brother's spirit about her, and that the remark of his late Russian acquaintance was probably a good deal nearer the truth. However, he had no time for further reflection, for by this Hugh was introducing him to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. That lady extended her hand graciously to him as she said with a smile :

"Ah, Major Byng and I are not like people meeting for the first time. Is it not so? I have heard much of him, not only from Captain Fleming but also from my brother. Alexis owes his life to you, monsieur."

Tom murmured some common-place remark to the effect that any one else in his place would have done the same, but even as he spoke he thought there was a slight curl in

Mademoiselle's lip, a wicked flash in her eye, and though she had naturally a very sweet voice, its tones jarred upon his ear, as if, fair though the words, they were spoken in mockery. Still, the young lady could be very winning when she chose, and for the next few minutes, there was no doubt, she exerted all her fascinations to subjugate Tom, and at the end of that time he had come to the conclusion that he was a suspicious old beast and was beginning to lose faith in everyone. He had forgotten that Hugh, in ordinary courtesy, could not indulge his thirst for information concerning letters, camp news, &c., until Mademoiselle had, so to speak, finished with himself, and Mademoiselle entirely monopolised him till the band was over, and the gardens rapidly thinning. Then she turned to address a few courteous words to Brydon and explain that she was *désolée* at hearing they were returning to their lines that night.

“I was in hopes that you were about to pass a few days here, when I should have had

the opportunity of really making your acquaintance, but you will come up again in a week or two, won't you? Major Byng says it's to be so, and I shall hope to see more of you then."

"No letters for me," exclaimed Hugh, "and yet, like the dear good fellow you are, you say you wrote to Nellie and told her that I was all right."

"There is no letter for you from Miss Lynden," replied Byng. "She wrote to me as I tell you in the first instance, but I've not heard from her since I wrote to tell her you were all right. I can tell you no more."

"It's deuced odd," said Hugh as he knit his brows, "I can't understand it."

"Captain Fleming," said Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, "I must once more claim your services. You promised to be my escort to Madame Radski's tea."

"Yes, it's time to say good-bye," remarked Brydon, "you see Tom, our friends are waiting for us."

“Ah, some of our officers are going to entertain you,” said Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. “I will therefore say good-bye. Remember, you are not to be long before you come to see us again,” and she bowed to the two Englishmen.

“Well, good-bye, Hugh,” said Byng. “I had hoped you’d have seen us through this *ponche*.”

“Ah, if that’s it,” laughed Mademoiselle, “I’ll release you, Captain Fleming. I cannot well go to this tea without an escort, but that is of no consequence.”

“Ah, no,” replied Hugh, laughing, “we cannot have your tea sacrificed for a *ponche*. I will take you to Madame Radski’s and I shall have lots of time to say good-bye to my old comrades here afterwards,” and with that Hugh walked off with Mademoiselle Ivanhoff.

“Fancy that Russian fellow’s about right,” said Brydon grinning, “and that Master Hugh is in the toils. We live and learn, Tom, and it strikes me that being taken

prisoner is a long way off the worst thing that can happen to one in campaigning."

"Hugh looks like making a confounded fool of himself," rejoined Byng, sulkily. "As you know, he is engaged to as nice a girl as ever stepped, at home, and as for 'Sister Marie,' forsooth, she's a deal too good-looking a young woman to have prancing about a hospital. I could laugh outright when I think of the mental picture I drew of her at Vanoutka, when I got her letter. There's not much of the hospital nurse left about her now. Well, come on, Heaven send us safe through this *ponche*, for we've a long ride before us, and these Russian fellows can drink vodka by the gallon without its affecting their heads."

CHAPTER VI.

BATCHI SERAI.

Byng's anticipations, however, proved groundless, their entertainers quite recognized that they had a good many miles to ride that night, and had no intentions of challenging them to a drinking bout. There was no attempt to press them to do more than drink a stirrup cup. Caviare and brandy were scattered about the tables of the restaurant, but the staple of the entertainment of Byng and Brydon consisted of bottled stout, which was dispensed to them in wine glasses, and forcibly recalled to their minds Mr. Swiveller's celebrated dictum on the tasting of malt liquors. It was not till they had purchased their experience on a subsequent visit that they realised the delicate

intentions of their entertainers. In the eyes of a foreigner, an Englishman is regarded as a beer-drinking creature. At all events he was in the days of which I am writing, and the Russians when they produced the stout were producing their choicest vintage. Bottled stout was dearer in their lines than champagne, and sold currently at twelve shillings a bottle. However, the *ponche* was soon over and the pair were once more jogging along on their homeward way. Each man was smoking and immersed in his own reflections. Tom could not help thinking of his parting with Alexis Ivanhoff. He had not thought so much of it at the time, but the sister recalled the brother's manner so vividly to his recollection. Ivanhoff had asked him his name, declared that he owed him his life, and that though it was not likely it might chance to be in his power sometime to repay the obligation, in the hurly-burly of a big war like this there was no knowing what might happen, still Tom

thought there had been a *soupçon* of mockery in his tones as he spoke. If he had saved his life, Tom had most certainly disappointed the ambitions based on his successfully carrying out his hazardous enterprise, and Tom reflected that but for himself, the Russian might have regained his own lines unhurt. No, it was open to question whether the Ivanhoffs owed him much gratitude. However, he was not likely to see much more of them even if it should chance that he met Mademoiselle again in their proposed trip up the country. There was great curiosity to hear their report, when, at a late hour, they made their appearance in the mess-room. Everyone was delighted to hear such a flourishing account of Hugh Fleming; but what explanation did he give for not writing? and now it flashed across the two travellers, that in that brief conversation with Hugh that point had never been touched upon. It was odd, Byng admitted, but they had so much to talk about

he had quite forgotten to ask Hugh that question.

“I suppose he hadn’t time,” at length said Brydon, “Fleming’s got his hands pretty full just now, I should say,” he continued with a mischievous glance at Tom. Brydon invariably discountenanced marrying amongst his brother officers. He held that it spoilt the mess, and that soldiers had no business with wives, holding I am afraid to the slack breezy old adage of a fresh quarter and a fresh flame. Byng resolutely declined to be drawn upon this point, but some of the others were not so reticent, and were much amused with Brydon’s account of “Sister Marie.” “Nobody but a born fool,” he concluded, “would ever dream of coming off the sick list with such a nurse as that.”

“Was she so very handsome then?” enquired a susceptible subaltern.

“Well, it’s so long since I’ve seen a pretty woman that I’m hardly a fair judge, but she’s about as good-looking as they make ’em.

And now I'm off to roost, for I'm dog-tired. Good-night all of you."

Nothing much in all this, but idle gossip travels a long way at times.

* * * * *

Hugh Fleming was quite conscious that he had rather got himself into a scrape of late, it had come about so naturally and so gradually that he really, to this minute, could not exactly say how it had all happened. In those early days, when he lay badly wounded and burnt up with fever, when the fires of life were flickering day by day, and when it was doubtful that he would ever see a morrow's sun, he was only dimly sensible of a soft hand that bathed his brow and smoothed his pillow, of a gentle presence that hovered around his bedside, and seemed to bring with it rest and quietness. As his strength and powers of observation returned, it was soothing to lie there and watch the tall slender figure of his nurse as she busied herself about her ward, and he became aware

that, in spite of the unbecoming costume, Sister Marie was a young and good-looking woman with brilliant dark eyes and a particularly sweet smile. During that tedious convalescence, her assiduity was unwearied. She encouraged him to talk to her about himself, checked him quietly but firmly whenever she thought he was overtiring himself, and in short, in those days of weakness, drew from Hugh pretty well his whole history. Not a very eventful one, nor had she any particular interest in learning it, but previous training had rendered this almost intuitive with Marie Ivanhoff. As he got better and stronger and was able to leave his sick bed, it was Sister Marie's arm that supported his tottering steps, the dark eyes softening marvellously when she was employed in his service, and before three months had elapsed from the storming of the Redan, Hugh Fleming awoke to the fact that he was on very sentimental terms with his nurse. The Russian sick, like the English, now the hardships of campaigning were

relaxed, improved rapidly. If supplies were not so plentiful as in the British lines, still, at Batchi Serai there was no lack of sufficient food. Nature, that mighty assistant of all doctors, was having fair play, and now lending her powerful aid with a will. The consequence was, the hospitals were rapidly vacated, and at length the number of patients became so few, that Marie Ivanhoff and one or two more of the younger ladies resigned their posts, threw off their dresses as nurses, and once more appeared radiant in their ordinary apparel.

Hugh was much struck when his late nurse presented herself, no longer, as she laughingly informed him, in that capacity, but as Mademoiselle Ivanhoff come to visit M. le Capitaine Fleming and congratulate him on his recovery from his late serious illness. It is possible that Hugh rather overdid the gratitude on this occasion, and thanked Mademoiselle more effusively and affectionately than was absolutely necessary,

but one thing is quite certain that Fleming found he had slipped imperceptibly from the rôle of a patient into that of a lover. And if soft smiles and sweet glances went for anything, into that of a favoured one too—Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was no innocent girl, but a worldly young lady, who had seen men and cities; but she was also of an imperious disposition, and one who gave free rein to her caprices—one of those women who indulge in those small whirlwinds of passion which their imagination so magnifies. Flirtations with them, while they last, always assume the dignity of a *grande* passion, Mademoiselle on this occasion had become, in the first instance, interested in the man she had nursed back to life. She had wound up by falling in love with him after her fashion.

Ah, they were dull, these provincial towns, this young Englishman would serve to amuse one here in the spring-time; and from this point of view Marie had appropriated

Hugh in the beginning. However, it could not be said from want of competition Mademoiselle Ivanhoff had allowed herself to be more infatuated about this new lover than she usually permitted herself. There were plenty of her compatriots quite willing to enliven Batchi Serai for the capricious lady. She never lacked admirers, let her go where she would, but she had elected the Englishman her cavalier, and all endeavours to shake his position proved hopeless.

It was awkward for Hugh, but it was not very easy to say how he could extricate himself. He was a prisoner, and so could not run away from temptation. He could not quarrel with the woman who had nursed him unweariedly through that terrible illness. It was not that he was false to his English love, though there were passages in his flirtation with Marie Ivanhoff that would have scarcely met her approval. Still, when a young man of about six and twenty, as in Hugh's case, is exposed to all the fascinations of a pretty

woman, who makes no attempt at concealing a *tendresse* for himself, it is small wonder if he gives occasion for the coupling of their names in the gossip of a small country town.

It was very singular, Hugh thought, that no news should have come to him of Nellie Lynden, of course he didn't get his letters with the regularity he would have done in his own lines, but still, they did come to him, and at uncertain intervals a few were forwarded by his own regiment, so that had Nellie written he most certainly ought to have received anything there might be from her. His promotion too, he had ceased to think about that, he was out of it now, and it little signified what regiment bore him on its strength. He supposed that it was all over, that they would be all on their way home soon; in Batchi Serai they seemed just as convinced that the war was finished, as they were in the Allied Camps. Hugh could not but admit that there was some truth in what a Russian Colonel had said to him :

“Yes, you have taken Sebastopol, but to the defence belongs all the glory. When the siege becomes history, it is not your side who will be most talked about, and among all the chiefs engaged in it, Todleben will stand out a head and shoulders above the rest.”

But what did Hugh care about history. The present was what he had to do with, and very pleasant he found it. It was *lotos* eating if you will, this dangling at the skirts of Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, it was not behaving quite fairly perhaps to his fiancée, but then, what could he do? It might not be quite right, but it was very pleasant; if his conduct was not exactly what it ought to be, he at all events, couldn't help it, and because a man was engaged to be married to one woman, he wasn't justified in behaving like a brute to all the rest. It would all come to an end now in a few weeks, and Marie and he would part dear good friends. He certainly did have occasional misgivings, that parting might be

an unpleasant business, he had not promised marriage to Marie Ivanhoff, neither had he informed her that he was pledged to another. But that young lady undoubtedly regarded him as quite her own property, and Hugh knew full well that those dark eyes of hers could lighten on occasion, and that she was not the woman to take a wound to her *amour propre* tamely.

There were two things that certainly ought to have occurred to Hugh had his mind not been pre-occupied, namely, that taking all the circumstances into consideration it would be as well that he should return to England, and secondly, that if he set to work in earnest there would probably not be much difficulty in his doing so. He was a prisoner on *parole* at present, and the peace he regarded as almost certain. It was not likely that the Russians would refuse him permission to go home if he would simply give his word not to serve against them in case of a resumption of hostilities. But if all this failed to cross the

mind of Hugh Fleming, Tom Byng and his old brother officers were considerably struck by it. Why Hugh lingered at Batchi Serai was inexplicable, except upon the grounds of his having fallen deeply in love with this fair Russian. That would account for everything, otherwise it was so very odd that he didn't come to spend the last few weeks of the Crimean campaign with them. None of them doubted that he had only to apply for such permission to obtain it, and one would have thought that he would have enjoyed having a last look at the old places where they had fought and suffered, in the society of the old comrades who had fought and suffered with him.

“Hang it,” as Brydon said, “he ought to be anxious to see us, but when a fellow gets in that way he loses all sense of regard for his fellow creatures bar one. I'm blest if I don't think he looked upon Tom and me as rather *de trop* at Batchi Serai the other day.”

It may easily be supposed that Fleming

had no monopoly of the correspondence from Manchester. The regiment had been stationed there for some months, and one or two of his brother officers, although not circumstanced as Hugh was, exchanged a few letters with friends they had made there. And so it came to pass that though Hugh did not go to England, the news of his entanglement with Mademoiselle Ivanhoff did, and in due course it came to the ears of Frances Smerdon.

CHAPTER VII.

POLLY'S MARRIAGE.

FRANCES SMERDON had been leading a life of great discontent of late ; she was restless and discontented because she was left in complete ignorance of a good deal that she was anxious to know. Of Nellie Lynden she had heard no word since she said good-bye to her at Manchester. Where she was, or what she was doing, Frances had no idea. That Hugh Fleming was alive and well she had gathered from the papers, which all contained paragraphs concerning the missing officer. In her anxiety to hear something of Nellie, she had written to Polly Phybbs, but the girl could only reply that she knew no more than Miss Smerdon, she had never seen or heard of either Dr. or Miss Lynden since their departure, that there were letters for both of

them, but she did not know where to forward them; she further informed Miss Smerdon that it was very awkward, she did not know what to do; that the landlord of the house would, she was afraid, shortly give trouble; that a half year's rent would become due ere long, and that the proprietor stated that if he could hear nothing of the doctor or his money by that time, he should be compelled to take the house once more into his own hands; that he did not understand a gentleman in Dr. Lynden's position absenting himself in such an extraordinary fashion, that it would be called absconding as a rule, and was suggestive of Dr. Lynden having fled from his creditors, but he acquitted him of that, because to the best of his belief, he owed no man money in the city, except himself. Why could the doctor not have given up the house before leaving, if he had no further use for it? That was the usual custom with yearly tenants. He had been treated with no consideration, and should

certainly not keep a house vacant for a man who had behaved as badly to him as the doctor had done. The result of this one man's grumbling was that an idea gradually sprung up in the neighbourhood that the doctor had fled to escape the consequences of his evil doing, though of what his evil doing consisted no one had an idea, even a name was not given to his assumed crime.

Such, narrated in wandering fashion, was the gist of Polly Phybbs' letter, and Frances was fain to admit that there was scant information to be gained from that quarter. The one thing it seemed to point to was that Doctor Lynden had no intention of returning to Manchester; that something might have occurred to necessitate his leaving it temporarily was easy to understand, but it was singular that he had not found time to make his landlord acquainted with his decision.

The weeks slip by, and the Easter of eighteen fifty-six is at hand. Peace is not

proclaimed, but is known now to be an absolute certainty ; and as Frances Smerdon thinks over the great drama that is now played out, it all seems to her like a dream. A few months back, and she had felt herself intimately connected with some of those who were playing their parts in it, and now she had no idea what had become of them. Her bosom friend, Nellie Lynden—Hugh Fleming, Tom Byng—she had lost all knowledge of them. The papers, it is true, still mentioned the doings of the Crimean Army, but the fighting was over, there were no deeds of arms now to chronicle, and the letters of “Our Special Correspondents” were chiefly made up of accounts of their own tours up the country. It was rarely that there was any allusion to particular regiments, and of the doings of the —th she had heard never a word for months. Now it may be remembered that there resided at Manchester a Mrs. Montague, who had constantly acted as chaperone to the two girls. She had never

maintained any correspondence with Miss Smerdon, but one morning Frances received a letter from her. She was a well meaning, frivolous, gossipy woman, but news to her was as the breath of her nostrils. She was never so happy as when either receiving or retailing it, and she had just picked up the story that Hugh Fleming was engaged to be married to a Russian Countess. Like everyone else, she was in perfect ignorance of where Miss Lynden was, otherwise she was just the woman to have at once hastened to condole with her on the infidelity of her lover. Not being able to write to her, she thought the nearest approach to it would be to write to Frances Smerdon, as her most intimate friend. Frances was thunderstruck at hearing such a rumour was current, and her first feeling was one of indignant disbelief. But as she reflected on Mrs. Montague's news, came the recollection that though that lady was an inveterate gossip, she was for all that a veracious one. That such stories as she

might have to tell she had at all events heard and not invented. Still, it was hard to believe, so thoroughly in love as Hugh Fleming had been, he had proved faithless in so short a time. Ah, well, she had made as terrible a mistake in her own case, and perhaps she was quite as far wrong in Nell's. Then Frances came to the conclusion that if this was true, well, her friend was well out of her engagement; that a man so fickle as Hugh Fleming was not worth wasting a thought about, but for all that she felt that Nell Lynden would not feel it quite so easy to tear this love from her breast, a love that had cost her such heartache and anxiety during the past year. She longed more than ever to be by her side and comfort her during this fresh hour of trial, and yet she knew that Nell was the last girl to bear with commiseration from anyone in such trouble as this would be to her. There was only one means to inquire into the truth of this report that Miss Smerdon could think of, and

accordingly she once more wrote to Polly Phybbs to ask if she had heard anything of her master and mistress. The reply was as before, nothing.

Miss Phybbs at present had her hands tolerably full of her own affairs. Police Constable Tarrant had been blest with another inspiration. What Sergeant Evans had gathered from their investigation of the laboratory Dick had no conception. That the Sergeant did not think much of his own astuteness, Dick had gathered from his concluding words on that occasion, but it happened to suit him to persevere in the belief that the doctor was guilty of malpractices of some sort. And, as we know, the opinion of the neighbourhood rather favoured that supposition. Mr. Tarrant impressed upon Polly that it was more imperative than ever that strict watch should be kept upon the doctor's house. He had his own reasons for this, having been suddenly struck with a brilliant idea ; it was perfectly preposterous

that he should be paying for his lodgings while such an excellent billet as the doctor's house was next door to vacant.

“You see, Polly,” said Mr. Tarrant, “the way the doctor went off is in itself suspicious, and of course he'll have to account for himself. When you want to catch a fox watch his earth. Now you see I can't depend upon you ; you've let him slip through your fingers once, and you'd do it again. Of course, for keeping an eye on 'em there is nothing like living in the same house, but then, you see, it ain't in you. It ain't your fault, it's not everybody's got the gift of observation.”

“I don't believe Doctor Lynden will ever come back.”

“Oh yes he will, they always do. Now, I tell you what, my girl. I'm just going to combine business and economy. What do people do when they go away for nobody knows how long, like Doctor Lynden? What do they do, I say? Why, they puts a

caretaker into their house of course, and who makes the best caretaker? A policeman, a man like myself, who is both a guardian of the law and a keen observer. My wages ain't that liberal that I can afford to play ducks and drakes with my money, and it's all nonsense my paying for my lodgings while there's plenty of vacant bedrooms and the run of a tidy kitchen here for nothing."

Now all this gave rise to not only discussion, but considerable altercation between these two. Mr. Tarrant was a man not much given to see beyond his nose, and whose keenness of observation was pretty much confined to what affected his own comforts. Polly, on the other hand, demurred to his becoming an inmate of the household. She pointed out that if she allowed him to come and live there, in the absence of her master, it would give rise to considerable scandal among the neighbours at her expense. This, Mr. Tarrant promptly met with a proposal to marry her at once. Polly was quite aware

that this was a piece of imprudence; that she had not money enough yet put by with which to start housekeeping, and it was simply preposterous to suppose Dick had any reserve fund of this nature; that their position at the best would be extremely precarious, terminating of course as soon as the house was tenanted again. But Dick was obstinate, he argued that there were always plenty of houses to let in Manchester, and that if he once got a start in this sort of employment he should never be out of a job, and so, after they had quarrelled and argued over the subject for some weeks, Polly eventually gave in, and consented to become Mrs. Tarrant during the approaching Easter week. It was all over at last, Miss Phybbs had become Mrs. Tarrant, and Polly, having taken care to obtain the consent of the landlord, in the absence of her master, Dick was duly installed in the berth he coveted, and combined the post of caretaker of Dr. Lynden's house with his official duties.

After poring for some days over the papers he had taken from the doctor's laboratory, Sergeant Evans felt pretty sure that he had got to the bottom of the doctor's mysterious occupation.

"I've heard of such a thing," he muttered. "Ah, heard it talked about often since this war began, but I never much believed in it. I've been told often that England is full of Russian spies, and I have very little doubt that the doctor is one of them, and a top sawyer at the game. All those papers I took away from his laboratory mean that, if they mean anything, but I don't know what use we could make of it, even if I could prove it for one thing, and if we could catch him for another. I have never attempted to follow him up since he left, but he's probably well abroad by this time. I don't know what they'd do with a Russian spy, even if you took him red-handed. Out there in the Crimea, they shoot such vermin, I believe, but we couldn't do that here; nor do I

believe that we could legally hang him. Ah, well, he's gone, and there's no more to be said about it. I take it, though, I could make it pretty hot for some of his correspondents if I only knew their names. They are employés in Government offices, I should fancy, many of them, and surely they are liable to punishment. The lady of the roses is the only one I know by sight, and further than that she came from London I know nothing about her. He must have paid well, but even then, she doesn't look the sort to mix herself up in such a dirty business. That woman is a real lady, and holding her head pretty high too. Ah well! given a passion for dress and a craving to take a place in the world, and there's no saying what a woman won't do. Who is she? She's a wedding ring on her finger, I wonder what her husband is! That fellow's most likely high up in the War Office, the Foreign Office, the Treasury or something, and selling Government information to pay for his wife's

extravagance, dress and display," continued Sergeant Evans, shaking his head sagaciously. "Ah, dress and display! what a lot of domestic firesides you have bust up to be sure. It don't seem to matter a deal whether the man's on a clerk's stool at a hundred a year, or whether he's in the director's parlour at five thousand. Well, this is all very pretty theory, but it ain't evidence. I've got the clue in my hand, it wouldn't be difficult to shadow that lady home, and then find out all about them. It's a beautiful case, it's a sin to give it up, it's just lovely; but then I'm not engaged in it.

"No," continued the Sergeant, "when people want one thing it's no use giving them another. When people are looking for the North Pole it ain't a bit of use sending 'em a lot of valuable information about Central Africa. Scotland Yard wants a coiner; well, I can only say we don't happen to have the article on hand at present. Scotland Yard must catch him themselves.

As for Lynden, he'd doubtless his own reasons for making a bolt of it, though as far as I actually know there was no cause for his going. It's a very pretty puzzle, and I shall always feel sorry that the working it out didn't fall into my hands professionally. As for this Tarrant—how we came to take such a thickhead as that I can't think. I should recommend the Chief to get rid of him at the first opportunity; and if I know anything about the lazy, good-for-nothing hound, he won't have to wait long for that."

CHAPTER VIII.

“EASTER EGGS.”

THE expedition that Byng and Brydon had planned, and of which the ride to Batchi Serai had been only the forerunner, was now on the point of departure. There were half-a-dozen of them altogether, and they were taking with them a cart drawn by two stout ponies, which conveyed a bell tent for themselves, and a picket tent for their servants, besides rugs and other impedimenta. They were going, as Byng laughingly remarked, like all other fashionable people, into the country for Easter. They had got a week's leave, and the programme was to make their way up to Simpheropol by easy marches, and see as much as they could of that and any other towns before their return. They were to camp out, and so be thoroughly independent

of hotels, while as for provisions, there would be no difficulty whatever in procuring them. It was a very pretty little tour, and many of them often looked back in after days to the free life they led, and the week's fun they had when they were campaigning in Russia on their own account, when there were no Colonels or Commander-in-Chief to trouble them, and the only discontented man of the half-dozen was the man who had the middle watch. It was necessary that one of them should always be on guard at night, not that they feared either attack or robbery for themselves, but there was always the chance of one or other of the ponies getting loose and straying a little from their encampment, in which case his recovery would be very problematical.

“Well, I hope you fellows will have a good time,” said the Adjutant, who with two or three of their brother officers, had congregated about the mess-room door to see the expedition start. “By the time you come

back we shall, most likely, have heard something about when we are to embark for home."

"Ah, it will take a good while," rejoined Byng, "even when it's begun. Think what a lot of ships it took to bring us all here. Wonder whether they will take home the railroad! If I was a shareholder I should try and sell mine at Simpheropol. Good-bye!" and with that Tom and his companions rode off.

The party were by this all old hands at camp life, the organisation had been efficient, and the result was satisfactory in the extreme. As a matter of course they pitched their tent one night on the outskirts of Batchi Serai, and here they counted upon coming across Hugh Fleming and bringing him back to dine with them at least, even if they didn't bring him back altogether. They soon found that the Russians were already withdrawing their troops from the Crimea. Many regiments were on their way to cross the Steppes, indeed several of the officers who had entertained

Byng and Brydon a fortnight ago were already gone, so they were informed by a grey-headed old colonel, who told them he had fought against them at Inkermann, and had served at Sebastopol from that day to its fall. From him they learnt that Mademoiselle Ivanhoff and the English officer were also amongst those who had left the place. Where they had gone to he did'nt know.

"We have collected men," he said, "in the Chersonese from all parts of the empire, there was no keeping count of where they came from, any more than there is of where they are going to. My corps came from Moscow. They are on their way back to St. Petersburg, and I follow them to-morrow. Half of them we have left round Sebastopol, and though the weather is fine, the rest have a weary march across the Steppes before them. You are fortunate, gentlemen, your ships will carry you home."

"It's a rum go," said Brydon, after they had said farewell to the Russian Colonel,

“ but I can’t believe but what Hugh Fleming might have rejoined us at any time in the past month if he had wished to.”

Byng assented shortly. He was quite of Brydon’s opinion, but did not dare to discuss what he considered Hugh’s weakness. It all mattered nothing to him. If Hugh chose to jilt his *fiancée* and marry this Russian girl, it was no business of his. He thought his old chum was making a grievous mistake, and that though Mademoiselle might be extremely charming to philander with, Hugh would find she didn’t do as a wife.

“ Of course, she’s a tremendous pull,” he murmured. “ She nursed him through a deuced bad bout of it, saved his life, and all that, which gives her a claim upon him, and she struck me as just the sort of woman to rivet such manacles tight. We are all condemning Hugh, and calling him a fool, but very likely none of us would have come out of the thing a bit better. Men often find it difficult to escape an entanglement of this

sort, when the lady holds nothing like such cards as chance dealt Mademoiselle Ivanhoff.” With such reflections Byng beguiled the way back to their small encampment, he would say nothing to his companions, who, finding that Hugh was not at Batchi Serai, would probably, for the present, dismiss him from their memories, but would take every opportunity that afforded itself of ascertaining whether Hugh had veritably left the Crimea. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was apparently a lady of some note, and when they got up to Simpheropol, he would possibly learn something definite about her movements at all events.

The whole party were all in the highest possible health and spirits, and, as Byng foresaw, the strange conduct of Hugh Fleming had already faded from his companions’ minds. Had they not camped on the banks of the Alma and consoled themselves for not being present at that brilliant victory by bathing in the famed stream. At length they

pitched their tent in the environs of Simpheropol ; though not nearly so pretty, this was much more of a town than Batchi Serai. The semi-Oriental appearance which marked the capital of the Khans was absent here. Simpheropol was emphatically a Russian town, and just now thronged with Russian officers, and all that multitude of followers that an army, if stationed ever so short a time, rapidly collects round itself. The hotels, by no means numerous, were crowded, and the party rather congratulated themselves upon their own canvas habitations that made them independent. Easter was in full swing. The churches were thronged, and the bells seemed to peal continually, both day and night. Easter eggs were much in vogue, and more than one, gaily painted and beribboned, was presented to Tom and his friends. They attracted some little attention in the town, not that the British uniform had been an uncommon sight there for the last month, but they were rather a strong party,

and when they first rode into the place, many of the passers-by turned to stare at them.

They had lounged into one of the churches the evening after their arrival, and were listening to the solemn swell of the organ in the celebration of Midnight Mass, when Byng suddenly felt his arm touched, and turning round saw a neat-looking peasant girl at his elbow, who, throwing him a meaning glance, slipped an Easter egg into his hand, then breaking another in her own, nodded to him to do likewise, put her finger for a second on her lip, and vanished. Tom quietly made his way out of the church after his mysterious messenger, but at the door she looked back at him, frowned, shook her head, and signified, unmistakably that he was not to follow her. Then, once more making a motion with her hand, as if breaking something, she darted down the street and left Byng standing in the brilliantly lighted doorway of the building. Tom crushed the egg in his hand, as it had been clearly intimated

that he should do, and found, as he expected, that it contained a note, and marvelling considerably who his unknown correspondent could be, Byng proceeded to run his eye over it.

“ If you have a little more strength of mind than most of your sex, take away your friend. There is no keeping flies from the honey, and once cloyed with its sweets they are powerless to help themselves. You know what I mean ; your friend has fallen into the toils, and is but as wax in the hands of Marie Ivanhoff. I would wish no enemy of mine a worse fate than this. Who am I, and why do I interfere ? A woman, a woman on whom, in her insolence, Marie Ivanhoff has dared to inflict bitter wrong. She stole my lover from me, and though it is not yet a year since he died gloriously for Russia in Sebastopol, already this Englishman takes his place. Do you know what these Ivanhoffs are ? Unscrupulous adventurers, destitute of all sense

of honour and principle. The brother a gambler and duellist, the sister an intriguante, who plays with men's hearts as a conjuror with balls. What Marie may purpose to do with the Englishman I do not know — marry him perhaps, if he is wealthy. To save your friend I would not stir a finger, to thwart Marie Ivanhoff I would spend the last rouble I possess. Captain Fleming is a free man at this moment, although he does not know it. The Jezebel, whose slave he is, has contrived to keep back the order for releasing him from his *parole*. If you wish to see him, be in the same place, at the same time, to-morrow night.

“VASHTA.”

“Well,” thought Tom, after he had read it, “I’ve always known women to pick each other to pieces a bit, but for command of polished Billingsgate, it strikes me ‘Vashta’s’ about top form. However, whether all she says of Mademoiselle Ivanhoff is true, or, as

is very probable, not half of it, the sooner Master Hugh clears out the better for him. I'll be here to-morrow, and, if I can, take him away."

Tom's conclusion, as he came to find out afterwards, was pretty accurate. If Made-moiselle Ivanhoff was a born coquette, and plunged from one flirtation into another, she was very far from as bad as the *soi-disant* Vashta painted her. The two had been fast friends once, but had quarrelled, and there was now bitter enmity between them, enmity, too, of the most malignant kind on the part of Vashta, who lost no opportunity of magnifying the peccadilloes of the Ivanhoffs into crimes. Alexis Ivanhoff, for instance, was a gambler, certainly, like most of his countrymen, and he had also been out, but, professed duellist he was not; still he gave quite sufficient occasion for his detractors to blacken his character.

At a villa in the environs of Simpheropol

a lady was seated looking out across the Steppes, and musing in somewhat melancholy fashion how this episode in her life was to end.

"A few days," she murmured, "and I must set forth for my return journey to St. Petersburg. What am I to do with my Englishman? He is very nice, and I am very fond of him. I'm not very conventional, and not given to be afraid of what the world says, but I can't quite travel over half Russia with a gentleman who is not my husband. Shall I marry him? I can't make up my mind about that."

The door opened, and the subject of her meditations stood before her, one glance at his face told Marie that he knew of her treachery.

"I thought it very odd," he said, "that no answer was made by the Governor to my application. You told me it was always the case with all official business in your country, that those in authority could not be hurried."

“You might have known that all officials expect to be paid for speed.”

“You do them injustice. I am told that my freedom was restored to me some days hence. How is it that the letter has never reached my hands?”

“How should I know?” she replied, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. “The orderly sent with it perhaps got drunk, perhaps lost it. What does it matter?”

“It matters a good deal,” he replied quietly, but with a hardness in his tones to which she was totally unaccustomed. “I’ve business to do in England which brooks no delay.”

“You cannot think of that, Hugh, till you have seen me safe to St. Petersburg,” she murmured in her softest tones, and with a glance of her dark eyes, calculated to turn any man’s head.

Not two minutes ago and she had pretty well made up her mind that she and Hugh must part, but now, all the inborn coquetry of her nature was aroused, and she could no

more bear the idea of losing her lover than a cat could bear seeing a mouse escape from its claws. She was, too, just, at present, very fond of Hugh, and it had been solely from prudential motives that she had rather sorrowfully come to the conclusion that they must part. Now, passion had conquered prudence, and she had determined to detain him, cost what it might.

"I regret," he said, "that I am compelled to deprive myself of that pleasure. I have no right to be absent from England an hour longer than I can help. Where is that letter?"

"Hugh, dearest, you will see me to St. Petersburg, will you not?" she replied, gently laying her hand upon his arm, and utterly ignoring his last question.

"Where is that letter?" was his sole reply.

Marie Ivanhoff's eyes began to sparkle, and it was with some little asperity that she rejoined:

"I have told you I know nothing of it"

“Excuse me, you are mistaken. I have been to the Governor’s office. I have seen the orderly who brought it. He did not lose it, but delivered it here at this house. I must trouble you to remember what you have done with it.”

Mademoiselle recognised too clearly the suppressed anger in his tones. What could it be that made him so anxious to get to England? Was this the man whom she had thought so completely her thrall, so securely compassed by her chains? Could it be possible that she had been beaten at her own game? That this Englishman had been staking counters all the time against her own gold pieces? Her cheeks flushed, and the dark eyes flashed ominously, as, still ignoring his question, she asked :

“What is it you are so anxious about in England?”

“To ascertain the safety of one I love,” he replied harshly. “The letter?”

“Of one loved dearer than any!” she half

unconsciously quoted ; and as she spoke the dark eyes gazed into his as if to read his very soul. “Stop ; do not speak, I can read my answer in your face,” then crossing the room rapidly, she opened an *escritoire*, and exclaimed : “Here is your letter, Monsieur.”

“And what right had you——?” he asked fiercely, as he took the letter from her hand.

“Stop !” she cried, drawing herself up to her full height, “spare me further humiliation. Your devotion to me has been all a farce. With your troth pledged to some white-faced English girl you have dared to amuse yourself with me. It is well for you that my brother is not at hand to call you to account for the affront you have put upon me. I have only now, Monsieur, to congratulate you on the complete recovery of your health, and to wish you *bon voyage*,” and, having bestowed upon him a stately courtesy, Mademoiselle Ivanhoff swept from the room.

Nothing could be more sarcastic than the inflexion of her voice, as she alluded to the

recovery of his health. Hugh could not but recall how much she had contributed to it. What a fool he had been in his wrath to all but blunder out that unlucky rejoinder. Did he want to tear the last shred off the woman's vanity, to whom he, humanly speaking, owed his life. But for such love as there had been between them he had not to hold himself much to blame. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff was no girl in her teens, but a young lady of wide experiences, and Hugh could honestly say that the temptation most decidedly came from her side in the commencement. He felt uncomfortable, nay, more, to do him justice, he was much distressed at the idea of so parting from his nurse, but he vowed to himself that he would never swerve from his loyalty to Nellie Lynden. Men are apt to be casuists in such matters, but I think it was perhaps as well for Hugh Fleming that Miss Lynden was not called upon to sit in judgment upon his case at the time. The most merciful of women would, I fancy, have thought the

offending too deep to be passed over lightly. As for Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, although she was for once defeated with her own weapons, no one could say that her retreat was not conducted with all the honours of war. But don't believe all the same that her quondam friend and betrayer did not know that her thrust had gone home, and exult in her own bower accordingly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROYAL REVIEW.

MADAME "VASHTA" had been very thorough-going in her vengeance and had written Hugh ample details of the treachery exercised towards him as regards his correspondence. She was too clever a woman to vilify Mademoiselle Ivanhoff to quite the extent she had done in her letter to Byng.

"These men are so foolish," she had said to herself. "If I place the whole turpitude of her character before him, he might be hot-headed enough to champion her," so she had confined herself to innuendoes as regarded Mademoiselle Ivanhoff's character, but had been very clear and distinct in her account of the tampering with his letters. He was quite aware from the talk he had heard amongst Russian officers, that Mademoiselle Ivanhoff

had rendered herself a little notorious by her numerous *tendresses*, but that she should have dared to keep back his letters, made Hugh very angry. That the fair “Vashta” had calculated upon, but having still some fears of his infirmity of purpose, she had further arranged that he should meet his English comrades at the church. Hugh employed the day in buying a pony, and in making preparations for his departure. He had heard that there was a party of English officers in the town, but he had not seen them, and did not know whether they belonged to his old regiment or not. He would go back with them if they were returning at once, but go back he would without further delay. Marie had kept her room closely all day, and though he had been in and out of the house he had not seen her since. He would fain have said : “good-bye,” and not parted with her in anger, but he would not so far retreat from his position of righteous wrath as to solicit an interview, and without seeing her again, he

set forth as his correspondent had directed, for the church at which he was assured he should meet his compatriots.

Byng was awaiting him, and after exchanging a hearty hand grip, the two made their way outside and commenced to pace up and down in the moonlight.

“I thought perhaps it might be you. I was told I should meet some of my own people if I came here to-night.”

“Yes, and you will come back with us, won’t you?” said Byng. “There surely can be no difficulty, now peace is proclaimed. We expected you two or three weeks ago. Brydon would have it that you couldn’t harden your heart to say good-bye to ‘Sister Marie.’”

“I’m coming with you at once,” rejoined Hugh, “and shall start for England by the first ship that will give me a passage. I’ve a notion I’m wanted there.”

“You’re better there than here,” said Byng drily, “but come along, we had best fetch

your pony, and then you can sleep in our camp, so as to be ready for an early start to-morrow morning."

The next day saw Hugh Fleming and his old comrades of the —th on their way back to Vanoutka. He told them all he had applied for his release on *parole* some weeks back, but by some mistake he had only received permission to depart on the previous day, and Tom Byng alone was aware of Sister Marie's perfidy. On arrival in camp Fleming lost no time in seeing about a passage for England, and in two days he had bidden his comrades good-bye, and steamed out of Balaklava harbour.

* * * * *

Weeks slip by, the embarkation has begun in real earnest, and every day sees some contingent of the Allied Army marching down to the transports that await them either at Kamisch or Balaklava. Sutlers are breaking up their stores and restaurants, and the luxuries of life vary in price in the

most astounding way, according as to whether the proprietors are anxiously getting rid of extensive stores or are very nearly sold out. Boards are sitting on war material, clothing, etc., with instructions to condemn it on the mere shadow of excuse. Ponies that would have been reckoned cheap at twenty pound apiece a few weeks ago, are turned adrift in the streets of Balaklava or sold for as many shillings. There is a fretting for home in the breasts of those whose turn has not yet come, and the anxiety to return to England seems almost as great as two years ago it had been to leave it. There is a feeling that the whole thing is "played out," that the curtain is down, and that there is not much fun in lingering in the lobby for one's carriage. We have been inside Sebastopol, we have gazed upon the caves of Inker-mann, from the Phoros Pass to Yalta, from the Valley of the Tchernaya to the Heights of Mackenzie, from the palace of the Khans to the Banks of the Alma. We have done

it all. We have fought the old fights over again until we are sick of discussing blood and carnage. Besides, as Tom Byng says :

“It’s our duty to hurry home, and tell lies for the edification of our friends and relations.”

Hurrah, the transport is in at last, and the order is come for Her Majesty’s —th to march down to Balaklava, and embark on board the steamship Adelaide at one o’clock, and that afternoon saw the regiment steaming down the Black Sea, whilst many a wistful glance was cast back at the fast fading cliffs of the Chersonese as thoughts arose in men’s minds of how many staunch and true comrades they left behind to sleep their last sleep on Cathcart’s Hill, or amongst the numerous grave yards that lie scattered on the plateau. Well might the Colonel say, as he went over the returns of the regiment from its landing to its re-embarkation,

“Thanks to drafts, we are taking home a strong battalion, but we’ve left another

behind. I don't think they'll be able to say we haven't *won our spurs* now."

It might almost have been termed sociable, their homeward voyage. The sea was alive with ships, all down the Mediterranean the signal halyards were constantly going, as they passed or repassed vessels, all engaged like themselves in the task of bringing the army home. Here they exchanged compliments with a large trooper similarly employed, now they dipped their flag to a French man of war, and anon lowered it to an English monster of the same kind. At last they anchored at Spithead to await their orders. These reached them the first thing the next morning, and directed a disembarkation at the dockyard, with a view to proceeding to Aldershot to take part in the great review that was to be held there by the Queen. The Camp had been in great measure vacated, to make way for as much of the Crimean Army as it was possible to assemble there. The Camp in those days was of considerably more

modest dimensions than it is now, and the accommodation was doubtless stretched to its utmost limits, which gave Mr. Flinn an opportunity of invidiously comparing it with that they had left behind them, and it must be conceded that the huts on the Aldershot dusty plain did appear rather at a disadvantage after the pretty camp at Vanoutka Pass, with the Black Sea smiling beneath it, as it had been when the regiment last saw it. Those few days were spent principally by officers in conferences with hatters and tailors, for absence, except for a few hours, was not accorded until the Royal Review should be over. At length, as many troops as could be laid hands on, or as many as could be got into Aldershot Camp, canvas included, which comes to the same thing, were collected, the day was fixed, and the Queen, accompanied by Prince Albert and the Prince of Wales, came down from London to review and thank the Army for their services. Half London was there to see, and half Hampshire, also, and despite

a shower or two the Royal Review was a grand success, and a more ringing cheer than went up from officers and men in answer to Her Majesty's speech has never been heard since, often though the voices of her soldiers have risen to greet her in that Cantonment.

And now, sad to say, a rather severe disappointment was destined to befall the —th. It was well known that they had been brought to Aldershot simply for this occasion, and what their ultimate destination might be was matter of grave speculation with both officers and men. Both, I think, conceived themselves entitled to a bit of a fling on their return, and when they were informed that they were to be quartered at Portsmouth, there was much exultation in the ranks. Mr. Flinn and many of the veterans opined that there was much "diversion" to be obtained in that town, the regiment had been quartered there before, and the old soldiers could speak with authority as to the capabilities of that

seaport. But when they detrained there it was broken to them that they were only to remain pending embarkation for Ireland, and that the Curragh of Kildare was their ultimate destiny.

“Faith,” said Mickey Flinn when he heard it, “it’s the divil’s own mess we’ve made of it, bhoys, by not settling out there. We’d a better camp than ever we’re likely to find at home and lashings of everything, that is as far as camps go,” but when it was further pointed out to the Colonel by the Brigade Major that they were so pushed for barrack accommodation that for the short time they were to remain there, the only quarters they could assign to the regiment was an empty convict hulk, the ridicule of the situation almost extinguished the disappointment it was. The Queen’s thanks, and a berth on board a convict ship, were such an incongruous recognition of their services, that both men and officers could not help laughing. “Tear an ’ouns,” said Mickey Flinn, “’ave

I'd only known it would end like this, I'd have qualified for the lodging and enjoyed myself. Oh, murther, to think I almost took the pledge till the review was over, for fear I'd be a disgrace to the regiment, 'deed bhoys, there's no encouragement for virtue and sobriety in this world."

Leave of absence was now granted to as many officers of the regiment as could be spared, and Tom Byng was amongst the first to take advantage of this. As he travelled up to town, he wondered a good deal what had become of Hugh Fleming, and how matters stood between him and Miss Lynden. The sudden cessation of her letters was singular. She knew that he was a prisoner, and surely she would have written a line to congratulate him on his escape from the very doors of the tomb. Mademoiselle Ivanhoff had no doubt tampered with Hugh's correspondence, but all letters for him from home had been directed as usual to the regiment, and forwarded thence by Byng himself at the

first available opportunity. He knew Miss Lynden's handwriting well, and could swear that no letter from her had passed through his hands since September last. Perhaps he should meet Hugh in town. Nobody had heard from him since he sailed for England, it was not to be expected. He would suppose that the regiment had left the Crimea shortly after himself. And then Tom began to meditate over his own immediate prospects, and what were the capabilities of the Curragh of Kildare.

“Well, there's a good spell of leave to start with,” he mused, “and that brings me well into the autumn before I have to rejoin, and as for huts we are used to them, and the magnificence of a barrack-room might only appal us. There will be a bit of racing to be done in September and October, and then comes the hunting. Besides it's close to Dublin, and they are a lively lot from all accounts in the Irish capital. Yes, upon the whole I dare say it will do very well. In the

meantime I shall make the most of the last few weeks of the season. Go everywhere and see everything! By Jove! I haven't been in a theatre for a twelvemonth, my dramatic taste wants rubbing up woefully."

On enquiry at the Thermopolium, the club to which they were both affiliated, he found that Fleming was in town, and though not in the house at that moment, was there every day. The club was thronged, and though, as a rule, its members were as smartly dressed a body of men as any in London, there were certainly some queer "get ups" to be seen fitting about it now, men who had not found time to renew their wardrobes, and in some instances habited in undress uniforms, from which the first gloss had considerably departed, but it's a question whether the Thermopolium had ever known livelier times than when the Army came home from the Chersonese. Tom Byng soon found himself amongst a knot of old friends, who hailed him gleefully.

"Now he looks fit, don't he?" cried Jim Lockwood, "for a man that was shot through the head, and then fraudulently persisted in doing his regiment out of the step by coming to life again. I *do* call him fit."

"How are you, Jim? Yes, we wintered well this time. Nothing to do and plenty to get, odd if we didn't look well."

"Well, you do, old man," rejoined the Hussar, "but there's one of you I'm sorry to say don't, and that's Hugh Fleming. He used to be up to anything, and now he seems to have no go left in him. Sits as glum as an undertaker over his wine, and his liquor seems to do him no good. I suppose, poor fellow, he's not got over the mauling he had on the eighth."

"I don't know," said Byng. "I haven't seen him for the last two months."

"Well, there's something wrong with him, he's not the Hugh Fleming he used to be."

A little later Byng encountered the man he was in search of, and the pair speedily drew a

couple of chairs into the window of the reading-room, and sat down for a long confabulation.

“Now, Hugh, what’s the matter,” asked Byng. “Some of the fellows here, told me just now, that you weren’t well, I can see you look worried to death, what is it?”

“Well, I am. I don’t know what to do, nor what to think; you know how I’m situated; you know I’ve had never a line from Nellie now for months. As soon as I got home, the first thing I did, was to run down to Manchester to find out what it all meant.”

“Well,” said Byng eagerly.

“She and her father have simply vanished. It appears they left their house months ago, quite suddenly, without saying a word to anyone. They have left no address, and nobody can tell me anything about them. There’s only an old woman taking care of the house, all I could get out of her was, that she hadn’t been there long, that Dr. Lynden had been gone for months, and that the house

was to let. If I went to the landlord perhaps he could tell me more. I tried him, which only resulted in rather strong language between us."

"How so?"

"Well, he knew nothing about Dr. Lynden, wished he did, and he'd have the law of him, he hadn't behaved to him like a gentleman, began to get abusive, and then I cut in, and told him I'd knock his teeth down his throat if he didn't shut up."

"Very natural," remarked Byng, "but hardly perhaps the best way to get information out of a man."

"Then I called upon Mrs. Montague, who was all smiles and smirks, and was she to congratulate me upon having celebrated peace by bringing home a Russian bride? Pleasant, wasn't it?" And Hugh shot a keen glance at his friend.

"Never mind," replied Tom, diplomatically, "let us pass over that episode."

"Then I asked her what had become of the

Lyndens. She immediately drew herself up, pursed up her lips, said they'd not taken her into their confidence, that people were so ill-natured, though she never believed half what she heard, that Dr. Lynden had doubtless his own reasons for going away so suddenly. People did talk so, etc., etc."

"And then," said Tom, "you cut in with another of your knock-down arguments, I suppose?"

"I never felt more like it," rejoined Hugh. "My adieux were a little abrupt, but I did manage to swallow my wrath. Still, there remains the question—What on earth has become of the Lyndens?"

"Nobody is ever lost in these days," said Tom, sententiously. "Why a quiet elderly gentleman should abandon his home, apropos to nothing, I can't imagine, but there's one thing you may rely upon, that now we are once more in England Miss Lynden knows where to write to you. Why, if she only put the regiment and London, it would get to you

eventually. If you can't find her, she can find you, if she likes."

"That just what it is," said Hugh, rising, "she won't. Some garbled version of what happened out in the Crimea has reached her ears. Mrs. Montague wouldn't have been so ready with her congratulations if there had not been some story of the sort flying about Manchester. No, old man, I've got to find Nell, and have it out with her, and you've got to help me."

CHAPTER X.

IN FULL CRY.

TOM BYNG was not the man to fail a friend who had claimed his assistance. He had heard Hugh's story, and having briefly arranged that they should dine together, announced his intention of having a "good solid smoke." Tom had much belief in the virtues of tobacco, and generally sought inspiration from it in some shape when the intricacies of this life seemed too much for him. Having taken an arm-chair in a retired corner of the smoking-room, and lit a Cabana of extra size to do justice to the occasion, Tom began to turn the whole thing over in his mind.

"Yes," he thought, "Hugh is right, that's what's the matter. That sister Marie story has come to her ears and she's fired up, and

not without reason, if she knew all. But the girl can't be lost, somebody must have her address. She must be found, things can't come straight between them if they don't meet, and after undergoing all the fears and anxieties of last year about him, it would be pitiable if she threw him over, now he's come home safe, because he indulged in a fool's flirtation out there. There can't be a question about his genuine love for her. By Jove, I have it! Miss Smerdon knows where she is. Hugh must write to her. I'll take odds he never thought of that, he would have said so if he had," and here Tom puffed viciously at his cigar, as he reflected that he could hardly well write to that young lady himself. "There's a bit of a coolness I fancy," he muttered, "between us, and I'd best keep out of reach of her sarcastic tongue for the present." And having, as he thought, satisfactorily solved his riddle, Tom dropped the butt of his cigar into the ash-tray, and proceeded to go for a good stretch before dinner.

When he and Hugh met at that meal, the latter was much struck by his companion's suggestion. Stupid of him not to think of it before; he would write that very night, so that his letter might go the first thing in the morning; and then, considerably to Tom's relief, began to talk of other things, though even these he discussed with a mind evidently preoccupied, and in answer to his old chum's questioning, admitted that he'd decided nothing as yet about the future, whether to stay in the Guards or exchange, or what.

Hugh's letter was duly written, and a reply was anxiously expected. Miss Smerdon's answer was what Mr. Swiveller was accustomed to designate a "staggerer." Very formally, coldly, and politely, Frances, in a few lines, informed Captain Fleming that she had no knowledge of Miss Lynden's present address.

"That's all nonsense," said Hugh, angrily, as he handed the letter to Byng. "Of course she knows where Nell is. She's got this

idiotic Manchester story into her stupid head——”

“Hullo, come, I say, young man, you must really moderate your language a little.”

For a few seconds Hugh looked keenly into his companion's face and then smiled as he remarked, “Well, people are very irritating, you know. At all events you'll admit there's no information to be gathered from that source.”

“More to be done perhaps by a personal interview,” suggested Tom, savagely.

“May be,” said Hugh, speaking quietly and softly. “Suppose you were to undertake it.”

“Out of the question,” said Tom, hastily. “If you don't see your way there's nothing more to be done there. Miss Smerdon and myself are on very distant terms.”

Further discussion led to no fresh suggestion. Tom stood steadfastly by his old axiom that Miss Lynden couldn't be lost, that the finding her whereabouts was only a question of time, probably of a few days, but he did

agree with Hugh that the Manchester story was most likely the cause of her withholding her address, and that to put things right between them, it was imperative that Hugh should see her. But how that was to be brought about, neither of them could say.

In the course of the day, however, Tom was seized with another inspiration. Turning the whole thing over in his mind, it suddenly flashed across him that on the day Hugh was taken prisoner, there was a private soldier named Phybbs, who declared he owed his life to him, and that this soldier was also a brother of Miss Lynden's maid. He remembered quite well having some talk with the man, and telling him to write his account of the eighth of September home to his sister.

"Now," thought Tom, "that maid, no doubt, is with her mistress at present, and surely Private Phybbs would know where his sister is living. That's it. Private Phybbs is the key to the whole mystery."

Tom was a man of decision, he rushed into

the nearest office and telegraphed to the Adjutant, to know whether the regiment had sailed for Ireland, and whether Private Phybbs was still with it. In less than two hours a yellow envelope was brought to him at the Thermopolium, containing the following message, dated Portsmouth :

“Still waiting for transport. Phybbs here.”

Having hastily thrown a few things into a portmanteau, Tom left a brief note for Fleming at the club, saying that he had been unexpectedly called out of town for a day or two, and by eight o'clock was steaming out of London on his way to the old seaport.

But Hugh also had his inspiration. He came to the conclusion that he had not pushed his enquiries half far enough at Manchester, and what is more, that he had made them in the wrong directions. It was quite likely that some of the shop people with whom they dealt would be able to tell him something about the Lyndens. If his idea

was correct about Nell, she would naturally not wish to see or hear from people of her own position. The old woman he had seen at the house was obviously only a caretaker, and indeed said she knew nothing of the people who had lived there before, except their name. He would run down to Manchester again, and see if he could not discover what he wanted. He could think of nothing else, and it was worth trying at all events. And so it came to pass, while Tom was speeding into Hampshire, Hugh Fleming was being whirled into Lancashire, both men strenuously in pursuit of the same object.

The latter began his search in the most methodical way, and with the sternest resolve to keep a check upon his temper, which, before the first day was over, was sorely taxed. The Lyndens had been gone some time, and folks seemed to have forgotten them for the most part, and when they did remember them, it seemed somewhat to their disadvantage, for there seemed to be a hazy

impression that they had gone away owing a lot of money. Still, he at last found a respectable tradesman who could tell him something. Yes, he remembered them quite well; they dealt with him almost ever since they first came to live there. As for their owing a lot of money, he didn't believe it; they had always paid him regularly enough. Pity he hadn't come a bit sooner; there were servants in the house for months after they left, who could no doubt have told him what he wanted to know. The parlour-maid married a policeman, he had heard, and that, he supposed, broke the thing up. What had become of the parlour-maid, he couldn't say. No, he didn't know what her name was now; Miss Phybbs she had been when he knew her.

Good gracious, what a fool he had been! Of course the sister of that boy in his old company. Ah! he wondered where that boy was now; the last time he had seen him was on the ground inside the Redan; he recollected rushing to the defence of Nell's

protégé. Ah, well, it wasn't much 'good, it wasn't likely he came out of that business alive. He would certainly write to the regiment and make enquiries, but there was little likelihood that Peter Phybbs was on its roll now. "Married to a policeman," he reflected, as, having thanked his informant, he walked away. "I dare say they could find out his name for me at their headquarters, there's no need for telling them my reasons for enquiring. I certainly don't want to invoke the aid of the police. The most respectable people would get indignant at finding the police laid in their track because they had forgotten to leave their address. No, I must confine my enquiries strictly as to the whereabouts of Miss Phybbs."

On making his desire known at the headquarters of the police, Hugh was at once asked to take a chair by the inspector on duty.

"We can tell you what you want, sir, I daresay, in a few minutes. Mary or Polly Phybbs, you say. A young woman living

here, and married some time this spring." And the officer turned to confer with one or two of his subordinates, and then consulted sundry ledgers.

"Ah," he said, at last, "this would be it, no doubt. Richard Tarrant, married to Mary Phybbs, spinster, April, '56. Leave granted to act as caretaker at Denton Lodge, the residence of Dr. Lynden."

"That's it," cried Hugh. "And now, where are the Tarrants living?"

"If they are not still at that address, I don't know that we can help you. You see Richard Tarrant has left us."

"When and why?" asked Hugh laconically.

"About a month ago. As for 'why,' unless you are finding him a situation it's not worth while going into particulars."

"And you've no idea where he is at present? Is his wife with him?"

"I can tell you nothing more about him, sir, than I have done already. It is possible

some of our people may know what's become of him, but I rather doubt it. He was a bumptious, rather queer-tempered man, and not popular in the Force. However, if you'll leave me your address, if I can learn anything I will let you know."

Hugh thanked the inspector and took his leave. He lingered for two or three days at the Queen's Hotel, in hopes of discovering the address of Mr. and Mrs. Tarrant, but, further than that Polly Phybbs had married Richard Tarrant, and spent her honeymoon in Dr. Lynden's old house, he could learn nothing. He was by this time fairly convinced that the discovery of his lost love lay through Mrs. Tarrant, and clung to the idea with all the persistency of his disposition—but he was just too late. Had he but sought her a month ago, he would have found her without trouble. Tricked he had been in the Crimea it was true, but he was fain to acknowledge to himself that had his senses not been lulled by Mademoiselle Ivanhoff's fascinations he

would have made much more stir in that matter of his release. Wearily he travelled back to town murmuring after the manner of most of us when our sin has found us out, "Too late! too late!" We are never so clear-sighted as to our wrong doing as when experiencing the unpleasant consequences that have come of it.

Tom Byng, on the other hand, had returned to town triumphant. He had gone on board the convict hulk the next morning, found Private Peter Phybbs, and had what Tom deemed a fairly satisfactory interview with him. No, his sister was not with Miss Lynden; whether his sister knew where she was, he couldn't say, but he thought it very likely she did. Since he had last heard from her she had got married; married a policeman, a cousin of theirs. He was afraid she hadn't done a very good thing for herself, for it seemed her husband had left the police, and he thought things must be going a bit wrong with them. He never had thought

much of that Dick Tarrant. When Byng asked him why he took such an unfavourable view of his sister's prospects, he admitted with some hesitation that she had written very gloomily to him a few days ago, and said that now Dick had left the police, she didn't know how they would get along; that she hoped to see him soon, and in the meantime could he lend her some money?

"That ain't like Polly, sir. She's a good girl and a careful girl; but that Dick, he's just one of that loafing sort who'll let a woman slave herself to death, and never do a hand's breadth of work himself. I used to be always at Polly about it. That Dick was always cadging for money out of her savings."

"Well, I suppose you'll go down to see your sister at once?"

"Yes, sir, I want a furlough as soon as ever I can get one, but you know they say that we belong to the Irish command, and must get our furloughs from the General over there. We didn't think that day in the

Redan we'd be put in a convict hulk when we got home, did we, sir? Have you seen anything of Captain Fleming in London?"

"Yes, Phybbs. I dined with him the night before last. He's very well."

"Ah, if it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't be here now. Not that it's much of a place to be in," continued Phybbs, throwing a most disparaging eye round the old hulk, "but it's better to be here than nowhere, ain't it, sir?"

Phybbs' theological ideas were somewhat primitive.

"You'd do anything to help Captain Fleming, eh?" said Tom.

"I'd do anything in the world for the Captain," said Phybbs, earnestly. "I ain't forgot that eighth of September, not likely I ever will."

"Then give me your sister's address. Captain Fleming wants to see her on a matter of great importance."

"I'll run down and get the letter this

moment, and if it's anything Polly can do, sir, I'm sure she will."

Phybbs disappeared down the hatchway only to speedily return with Polly's letter in his hand. Having carefully noted down the address, Tom bade his brethren in arms good-bye, and the afternoon saw him once more on his way to London. On arrival at the Thermopolium he learnt that Captain Fleming was not in town, and that the note he had left for him with the hall porter had never been delivered. Captain Fleming had not been seen in the club either that day or yesterday. Byng had now thrown himself into the search for Nellie Lynden enthusiastically. He had intended to have handed Mrs. Tarrant's address over to Hugh and started him off at once to Manchester, and now, as Tom growled :

"Here's the provoking young beggar not to be found."

He quickly settled in his own mind that if he did not come across Hugh that evening he

would go down to Manchester himself on the morrow. It would save time he thought, and enable Hugh to seek an interview direct with Miss Lynden, always supposing that Mrs. Tarrant was in possession of her address.



CHAPTER XI.

BAFFLED.

IN a decent lodging of one of the poorer suburbs of Manchester, Polly Tarrant sat at the open window, busily engaged in sewing. Already she recognised that the labour necessary for their support would fall mainly upon herself. Dick was by no means estimated by his superiors at the value he placed upon himself. Laxity of duty upon his part brought upon him rebuke, which petulant reply to those administering the “wiggings” did not tend to soften. Continual carelessness on petty points of discipline brought still sharper reprimand. Mr. Tarrant was by no means of the sweetest of tempers, and thought fit to indulge in recrimination with those having authority over him. Had he bowed meekly to reproof, he might have

weathered the storm, but defiance to those in command admits of no toleration amongst disciplined bodies; and so, as the Inspector politely put it, Police Constable Tarrant "left;" he might have added, not altogether at his own request. And not only did Dick by this forfeit the very substantial wages he was receiving in the Force, but that Utopian dream of his, of living rent free, as a caretaker of empty houses, also fell to the ground. As a policeman his position was a voucher for his integrity, but now he was neither of them, nor recommended by them. His capacity for regular work was of the frailest, and Polly soon discovered with some dismay that what her husband picked up by odd jobs he for the most part expended on his personal pleasures, whilst for the keeping up of their home she must fain rely upon the proceeds of her needle. She shut her eyes close to the bitter bad bargain she had made, as such women often do. If he was short in his temper at times, well, poor fellow, he had a good deal

to worry him, he couldn't help it, there were those inspectors, they had nagged at him until he could bear it no longer, and was obliged to leave the police. Work was hard to come by, and, of course, a clever man like Dick worried at not being able to do more to keep up his home. She stitched harder and harder, and would not see the imperfections of this false idol that she had set up, and made the most of two somewhat negative virtues. He did not get drunk, and he did not ill-use her, so Polly toiled on, and strove hard to hope for better times.

It was a warm summer day, and the cottage door stood open. Polly, as before said, was sitting at the window, and so engrossed in her sewing that she took no heed of a light footstep that crossed her threshold. The door of her room was ajar, it was pushed gently open, but it was not till a dark shadow fell across her work that Polly lifted her head, and became cognisant of a visitor. For an instant she sat spellbound, looking at the

dark-robed figure before her, and then springing to her feet, exclaimed :

“ Oh, Miss Nellie, dear Miss Nellie, how glad I am to see you.”

“ I’ve been looking for you two or three days,” replied Miss Lynden, bravely. “ And if it hadn’t been for cook, I should have been puzzled to find you. Our old grocer told me where she was in service, and she told me you were married, and where you were living.”

“ Yes, Miss,” said Polly, “ and Dick and me stayed on in the old house as long as they’d let us. But the landlord said we must go at the end of the half-year, and that he would put in a caretaker of his own. Is the Doctor quite well, Miss?” continued Polly, with some slight hesitation, and a quick, nervous glance at Miss Lynden’s black dress.

“ My father is no more,” replied the girl, and her lips slightly trembled. “ It is that, principally, that has brought me to Manchester. Till the lawyer here who had charge

of his affairs has wound them up, I do not know what I have to live on ; but I'm told it will not be very much. Are you well and happy ? ”

And Miss Lynden's eye already detected that wealth was at all events no ingredient to such happiness as there might be.

“ Yes, thank you, Miss,” said Polly, somewhat hurriedly. “ I brought away what letters there were for you when we left Denton Lodge. I didn't like to leave them with the old lady who succeeded us, and I didn't know where to forward them.”

“ Quite right ; though it's not likely there are any of importance.”

“ None of importance, Miss,” exclaimed Polly, triumphantly. “ Why, there's three from the Crimea ! ” But to the girl's astonishment her young mistress only replied wearily :

“ The Crimea is a thing of the past, and many a dream connected with it. However, get them, all the same.”

Polly's domain consisted of but two rooms, that in which her visitor had found her, like the cobbler's stall, was a combination of kitchen and dining-room, and, although it was summer, there was a spark of fire burning in the grate wherewith to boil the kettle. Disappearing for a moment into the adjoining bed-room, Mrs. Tarrant speedily returned with the letters. There were two or three for the Doctor and five for herself. The first she opened was from Frances Smerdon, imploring her to let her know where she was. A sweet, womanly letter, which, though touching on the close of the war and the prospect of seeing all their old friends home again, never alluded to her engagement. She pressed Nellie to come and pay her a good long visit at Twmbarlyn, saying she quite yearned for a regular afternoon's gossip with her ; but she never mentioned Hugh Fleming's name, and she had never of late omitted to inquire after him in her letters.

"Dear Frances," muttered Miss Lynden,

“ she knows all, and lets me see she does, but she’s too much delicacy to allude to it.”

The next letter she opened was that in which Byng had informed her that Hugh was alive, though wounded and a prisoner. She read it attentively.

“ Yes,” she murmured, bitterly, “ it was more manly not to speak till he was sure, than to go away with a lie upon his lips ; and after racking a woman’s heart-strings for a whole year, do his best to break it in the end. Yes, and here are two of his letters written by his lady-love’s side. I wonder whether he gave them to her to read before posting them to the poor fool at home who believed in him.”

The third letter Nellie opened was from Mrs. Montague. A commonplace epistle of vulgar condolence, expressing her opinion that Captain Fleming had behaved shamefully, that no man alive was worth breaking your heart about, that a captain in the army was no such great catch, and that she had never been

able to make out that Captain Fleming had any expectations. Up to the reading of this precious note, Nell Lynden's face had been sad and sorrowful, mingled with a slightly contemptuous expression, a feeling provoked by the thought that she should ever have allowed a man to win her love who was so utterly unworthy of it, but Mrs. Montague's commiseration was a very different thing. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes flashed.

"Insolent," she exclaimed, as she rose from her seat, and walked rapidly to the fire-place. "The idea of a woman like that presuming to pity me. I knew it, I was sure of it, all the people I knew here are laughing at me ; it is always the case when a girl is as shamefully treated as I have been. They pardon the offender, and laugh at his victim. Ah ! Hugh !" she continued, as her voice softened ; "it was but a sorry jest, to make a fool of a girl who knew no more of the world than I did. You might have had some little mercy. God help me ! lover and father both gone," and at

the thought she could not repress a sob. "Tears, you fool," she continued — "what have you to do with tears from henceforth? It is time this farce was finished," and as she spoke she tossed the whole packet of letters, including the two from Hugh, unopened, into the fire.

Polly Tarrant listened with open eyes to her young mistress's rhapsody, but when she saw those two letters cast unopened into the flames, she was literally petrified with amazement. She knew the handwriting of those two letters only too well. Last year, if there was a probability of anything arriving in that hand, Miss Lynden had often forestalled herself in answering the postman's knock. She had seen them read and re-read, and now, as Polly expressed it — "she's a-treating them like trade circulars."

"Polly!" said Miss Lynden, turning almost fiercely round upon her, and speaking in low, hurried tones, "I daresay you've heard me laughed at, I daresay you've heard all

sorts of horrid things about me and my poor father——”

“Indeed, Miss,” interposed Polly, “I haven’t heard a word against you, except from the landlord, who was always growling at the poor Doctor about that half-year’s rent.”

“Don’t interrupt me,” continued Miss Lynden. “I’m going to write you down my lawyer’s address. You must go up to the old house now and then, and any letters that may come for me or my poor father you will take to him. And through him you can write to me yourself occasionally, but remember that you are to deny all knowledge of me to everyone. Let no one know of any way in which a letter can reach me. For months and years,” and she glanced at her dress, “this will be my excuse for close retirement. I want to forget—ah! I have so much to forget. Never speak to me of the Crimea again. Let that terrible year be as if it had never been; let no one know that you

have seen me. And now I must say good-bye. You promise faithfully to do all I have asked?" and Polly, who was genuinely attached to her young mistress, and by this time dissolved in tears, although she did not understand about what, willingly faltered forth the required pledge.

"Once more, good-bye," said Miss Lynden. "I had no chance of giving you a wedding-present before, so you must take this and buy yourself something now;" and as she spoke Miss Lynden slipped a bank-note into Polly's hand, pressed it, and was gone.

Polly sat down and enjoyed the luxury of a good cry with her cup of tea; and I have feminine authority for saying that there is much enjoyment in a "good howl." What she was crying about Polly was not very clear, but I have also a suspicion that that is by no means necessary for its thorough appreciation. Her old master was dead, and her young mistress was in trouble, and it was very kind of Miss Nellie to give her five

pounds as a wedding-present, and then Polly's thoughts wandered off as to what she should do with it. I have an idea that she did not consult her husband on this point, having already learnt that the knowledge of any such windfall was best kept to herself. She did not know quite what had happened, but one thing was clear, Miss Nellie never wished to hear of the Crimea, or of Captain Fleming again. She wondered what had gone wrong between them, but of one thing she was resolved, and that was to adhere firmly to the promise she had given.

Only two days had elapsed, Polly as usual was sitting in the window, once more immersed in her sewing, when the sharp crunch of a man's boot on the gravel caused her to raise her head. Another moment and an impatient tap on the door betokened another visitor. She opened it, and found herself face to face with Major Byng. She recognised him at once and knew what errand he had come upon. It was all very well for Miss Nellie to

have done with the Crimea, but the Crimea hadn't done with Miss Nellie. She curtsied, put forward a chair, and asked Byng to sit down.

“ Well, Mrs. Tarrant, how are you ? ” said Tom. “ You recognise me, of course ? ”

“ Oh, yes, Major Byng, and I'm very glad to see you back safe again, after all you have gone through.”

“ Thank you ; yes, we had some roughish times out there. But you've got married since I last saw you. I congratulate you, and as an old friend you must accept a gift from me upon the occasion,” and Tom attempted to force a liberal *douceur* into her palm, but Polly hastily stepped back a pace or two, and putting her hands behind her, said :

“ I thank you very much, sir, but I cannot take your money.”

“ Why should you refuse a wedding present from me ? ” asked Tom, in no little astonishment.

“No matter, sir, I have my reasons, thank you very kindly all the same.”

“Of course, you must do as you like, but it’s rather a slight upon an old friend,” said Tom, smiling, “more especially one who has come all the way from London to see you.”

“Oh, no, you have not, sir,” said Mrs. Tarrant, looking decidedly obstinate, and, as Tom said afterward, “most confoundedly knowing, to boot.”

“There you’re wrong, for I have come from London to see you. I have come to ask you a question.”

Mrs. Tarrant made no attempt to help him out, but waited quite demurely till it pleased him to speak.

“I want to know where Miss Lynden is at present.”

“I don’t know, sir,” replied Polly, somewhat equivocally.

“But you know her address?” said Tom, sharply.

“I don’t admit I do, and if I did, I wouldn’t tell you.”

“She knows it perfectly,” thought Tom to himself.

“When did you see her last?” he enquired, with what he deemed much forensic ability, but the result rather startled him, for Mrs. Tarrant suddenly drew herself up defiantly, and replied :

“Look here, Major Byng, I’m not in the witness-box, and I haven’t married a police constable without having learnt that what I say may be used against me. Where is Miss Lynden now? I don’t know. What’s her address? I don’t know. When did I see her last? I don’t know. But I have every reason to believe,” concluded Polly, with indignant partisanship, “that she desires to have seen the last of you, *and all of you*, and may be it would have been better if she had never seen the first of you either.”

And now Tom committed a fatal error. Mrs. Tarrant had gradually lashed herself

into a very pretty fit of virtuous indignation, and in a vain endeavour to calm the storm, he prefaced his next speech with, "My good woman." This was pouring oil upon the fire; there was never an angry woman yet that this epithet did not goad to madness. It is galling, when you have given a loose rein to all the devil in your nature, to find it ignored and be blandly addressed as "good." Mrs. Tarrant was no exception to the rule, and indulged in a most uncomplimentary diatribe against the Army generally, expressed her opinion that it was a great pity that those who went to the Crimea hadn't stayed there, and that they ought to be ashamed to show themselves in Manchester, they ought. Still, amidst all this flow of language, Polly gave no clue to the cause of it, and Byng, at last convinced that there was no information to be obtained from her, was only too glad to fly from the storm he had raised.

"Well," he thought, as he tramped back, "this is a devil of a sell. There is no doubt

she knows where Miss Lynden is, and what her address is, but she's determined not to give it. I thought I was going to carry back such a bit of good news to Hugh. I wonder whether I bungled the business, whether offering her money at starting put her hump up? Thought I did it diplomatically, too—however, when a woman won't, she won't, and there's an end of it, and if ever a woman said 'shan't tell,' and meant it, it's Polly Tarrant. By Jove," he continued, taking out his watch, "I'm too late to go back to Town to-night; luckily I've got a portmanteau at the station. I'll send for it, and get a bed and dinner at the Queen's."

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMBASSADOR.

ALMOST the first man that Byng encountered in the hall of the Queen's Hotel was Hugh Fleming, and having given the necessary directions about his portmanteau, he at once bore him off to the smoking-room, to hear the account of his doings and disasters since they last met.

“It's something, you know,” said Tom, as he came to the end of his narration, “to have got this far. We've found Polly Phybbs that was, and I've ascertained that she knows all about it. Now the thing is, to make her speak. She won't for me, that's quite clear. Miss Lynden's dead full against you, and you've no chance of making it up with her, unless you meet her face to face. Mrs. Tarrant takes her late mistress' part, and is

an out and out partisan, and no mistake. I don't know what chance you have, but you'll have to try ; I don't see anything else for it."

"No, I must do my best," said Hugh. "I knew her a bit better than you did, and of course she knew Nellie and I were engaged. It's quite possible she was indignant with you, because she thought I ought to have been there in your stead. Heaven knows, I should have been, if I could have found her. I've been vainly trying to, for the last three days." So it was finally settled between them, that Hugh should try what he could do with the implacable Mrs. Tarrant.

Though that lady gave a little start of surprise when Fleming presented himself the next afternoon, still there was defiance in every fold of her dress, contemptuous obstinacy in every line of her countenance. Neither money nor argument should wring Miss Nellie's secrets out of her ; and if they insisted in worriting her in her own house, well, they should have a bit of her mind, that

was all. If Miss Nellie was above telling Captain Fleming what she thought of him, she wasn't. She frigidly acknowledged Hugh's greeting, and placed a chair for him, but it required no penetration to see that though at present on the defensive, she was prepared to assume the aggressive on slight provocation. Hugh wasted but short time on preliminaries, but came to the point at once. Would she give him Miss Lynden's address. He did not question whether she knew it; would she give it him? And Mrs. Tarrant's reply was, "not if she knew it," in every sense of the phrase. In vain did Hugh attempt to cross-question her. She would admit nothing, and gave palpable signs of becoming peppery under the operation. Quickly retrieving his false step, Hugh urged that he was engaged, as she knew, to Miss Lynden; that he had just returned from the Crimea, hoping to marry her, and that he could hear nothing of her; that she was withholding her address from him under a most erroneous impression;

that there had been an infamous lie circulated about him in Manchester — could Mademoiselle Ivanhoff but have heard that ! that this lie had probably reached Miss Lynden's ears ; that it had already occasioned him infinite unhappiness ; that he had, at all events, a right to demand an interview, if it was only to justify himself in her eyes—rather high a tone this, to take, under the circumstances—now would she give him Miss Lynden's address ?

No, she would not ; but though Polly was still inflexible in her refusal, she had softened very much in her manner. Hugh pleaded well, and Mrs. Tarrant was not insensible altogether to the titillation of acting as proxy for her mistress, in a good, strong love scene. She could not help thinking that if she had been Miss Nellie she would have at all events heard what Captain Fleming had got to say for himself. Whatever it was Miss Nellie thought he had done, it seemed they had been telling lies of him. But no ; she had

promised her young mistress, and she would be true to her word. Hugh at last saw that it was useless; he was conscious that he had progressed rapidly in Mrs. Tarrant's good graces, but he saw that she was quite inflexible in her determination to tell him nothing whatever about Miss Lynden.

“Good-bye, Mrs. Tarrant,” he said at last, “you’ve no doubt good reasons for refusing to give me her address, but you are wrong, and before long Miss Lynden herself will tell you so.”

As he uttered the above words, a man's head was suddenly thrust in at the open window, which, as Hugh at once guessed, belonged to Mr. Tarrant.

“I heard you'd a visitor,” said Dick, “as I came up the path, so I just looked in to see who it was. All right, sir, I'm coming in,” and as he spoke Mr. Tarrant withdrew his head, and in another minute entered his own abode, and looked enquiringly at the intruder.

“This is Captain Fleming, Dick,” said his wife. But this apparently conveyed nothing to Mr. Tarrant’s mind.

“He came to enquire after—” and here Polly hesitated a little—“after Dr. Lynden.”

“So I heard,” replied Mr. Tarrant, with the same stupid stare of amazement on his face. Suddenly a light seemed seemed to break in upon him. “Beg pardon, sir,” he exclaimed, “but you’re the young gent who used to come sweethearting after Miss Lynden. Captain Fleming, of course. I’d forgot, Polly. Bad business, sir. Ah, that Doctor was no better than he should be.”

“Dick,” flashed out his wife indignantly, “how can you say such things? It’s downright wicked to say such things of a man that’s dead.”

“Dead!” ejaculated Hugh. “Dead! are you sure, Mrs. Tarrant? How did you hear it?”

Polly felt as if she could have bitten her tongue out for the way it had betrayed her.

For a moment she hesitated, and then said, somewhat confusedly :

“ I forget now. I read it in the papers, I think, somewhere.”

“ Why you never told me a word about it,” said Dick. “ If you saw it in the papers, it would say where he died,” continued Mr. Tarrant with a cunning look, “ and I think this gentleman said something about behaving liberal to anyone who could give him Miss Lynden’s address.”

“ I’ve told Captain Fleming I don’t know it,” returned Polly, glancing uneasily at Hugh.

“ If what you tell me is true,” said Fleming, “ I am more sorry than ever that you don’t know it. Some of Miss Lynden’s friends ought to be with her in her affliction. If by chance you should hear of it in the course of the next two or three days, perhaps you will send it me at the Queen’s Hotel. Good morning,” and with that Hugh, more thoroughly convinced than ever of Polly’s knowledge on the point, left the house. He had not

got clear of the tiny garden before he heard a footstep behind him.

“Look here,” said Mr. Tarrant, “I ain’t been an intelligent officer in the police force without having learnt a thing or two. Don’t you believe her, sir. I don’t know what her little game is, but she knows all about those Lydens and where the young lady is. You want her address; leave that to me, Captain Fleming. Information’s worth paying for. I’ll leave that to you, sir. Queen’s Hotel. All right, sir; good-morning;” and Dick turned back into his cottage, determined that Polly should tell him all she knew at once. But in this Mr. Tarrant was destined to meet with disappointment. Polly had hitherto yielded implicitly to him, but for once she was adamant. Let him bully or wheedle as he might, and Mr. Tarrant tried both, she still persisted in her negation, and Mr. Tarrant waxed exceeding irritable at the idea of his wife’s trumpery scruples and Captain Fleming’s gaping purse-strings.

Rather a gloomy conference was held by the two friends when Hugh returned from his bootless visit. It was no use having ascertained that Mrs. Tarrant possessed the knowledge they wanted, if they could not make her speak. They came to the conclusion that unless her husband's influence prevailed there was nothing to be got out of Polly. As Byng remarked, "He was of no further use there," and so it was settled between them that he should return to London while Hugh should still remain at the Queen's on the chance of hearing from Mr. Tarrant. Tom indeed was anxious to get back to Town to carry out a new idea that he had got into his head. His ideas had so far disappointed him, and he was more than ever impressed with the advisability of keeping them to himself. He had bethought him of another power wherewith to overthrow Mrs. Tarrant's obstinacy. He determined to send for Private Phybbs and insist on his requiring this service of his sister, on behalf of the man who had saved his life.

It would probably have made no difference, but he cursed his stupidity for not having played this card during his interview with Polly. He had guessed that Hugh had probably made the same omission, from motives of pride. Men who do these things are not much given to bragging of them afterwards, or else in their conversation in the Queen's Hotel Tom had told Fleming how he had discovered Mrs. Tarrant's address, and he was therefore aware that Phybbs got through the eighth of September safely. Indefatigable in his friend's service, Tom, having ascertained by telegraph that though the transport for them was in, the —th had not yet sailed, rushed down to Portsmouth by the first train the next morning, and upon giving the Colonel a rough statement of the case, obtained a furlough for Private Phybbs, and bore him back triumphantly to Town in the afternoon, telegraphing to Hugh to hold on at Manchester. He explained to Private Phybbs what was required of him—that if he

considered Captain Fleming stood by him on that eighth of September, it was his bounden duty to stand by the Captain now he was in trouble. That if he owed his life to the Captain, this was his time to show himself sensible of it ; and having thus primed him, Tom dispatched Phybbs to Manchester by the earliest train he could find, and then, like any other great strategist, sat down to await the results.

But for Byng's telegram, not hearing anything from Mr. Tarrant, Hugh would have probably left Manchester, and passed Phybbs on his way. As it was, he took charge of that young soldier, and decided to wait and see what came of his interview with his sister.

Polly was honestly delighted to see her brother. His last letter had given her no expectation of his obtaining a furlough for at least another month. She was very fond of Peter, and had made a great pet of him as a boy, as sisters often will with brothers a great

deal younger than themselves, and she had cried very bitterly when she first heard that he had taken the shilling, and was for the wars bound. It had been a slight feeling of relief to find that he was in the same regiment with Mr. Fleming, who, she had vaguely thought, might befriend the boy. She was quite as conscious of the great obligation they lay under to him as her brother himself. If not from his own lips, she had it under his own hand, that if Peter was alive now it was thanks to Hugh, and it had tried her sorely to refuse Fleming the information for which he had pleaded so earnestly and well. But Miss Lynden's injunctions had been most positive.

"Now, Polly, I've a great favour to ask of you," said Peter, after the first tumultuous hugging and kissing had been got over.

"What's that?"

"Why it's about Captain Fleming, you know."

"Not that, not that," said Polly, hurriedly.
"He hasn't sent you here to ask me that?"

He knows I can't tell you. He knows the secret isn't mine, or I would tell him at once."

"But look here, Polly, you know the Captain stood by me once?"

Polly nodded assent.

"Well, I swore to myself that night that if ever I got the chance to do anything for him, I'd do the best I could for the man who saved my life in the bloodiest day I was ever in. Well, Polly, I ain't had much experience in sweethearting you see; since I 'listed my time's been spent in the Crimea, and on board a convict hulk, where there wasn't much opportunity, but I've heard men take the loss of a sweetheart terrible hard—now I'm told the Captain is in a fair way of losing his, and all because he can't see the young lady. Major Byng tells me you can manage it for him if you choose, and I shall call it real mean of you if you don't. You know what he wants you to do, now why don't you say you'll do it?"

"I can't, I can't indeed. I tell you I promised not!"

"What's that got to do with it?" replied Peter angrily. "Promise indeed! I'd break any amount of promises if the Captain told me to. Promise—why I'd break all the Ten Commandments if the Captain wanted it—besides, Miss Lynden herself will thank you for breaking that promise."

"How do you know?" said Polly.

"Major Byng told me so."

"And how does he know, I wonder?"

"Well, I'm sure. Wouldn't a major in the British Army know better than the likes of us about that or anything else?"

"Don't tell me," rejoined Polly, with a contemptuous toss of her head; "a woman knows more about that sort of thing than any ten men that ever stepped."

"But I tell you," persisted Peter, "that it's all a mistake. Miss Lynden's mistaken."

"What about?" said Polly, curtly.

"How should I know? Major Byng says

she is, and that the mistake would be put right in five minutes if Captain Fleming could only see her."

"But Miss Lynden doesn't want to see him."

"How provoking you are, Polly. Don't I tell you it's all a mistake, and how can you tell Miss Lynden don't want to see Captain Fleming until you let her know he is here?"

At last Polly was staggered. There might be something in this. She would be true to her promise, but she did not think there could be any harm in letting Nellie know that Captain Fleming was in Manchester seeking for her. And this much she told her brother she was prepared to do. But the ambassador had been too well coached in his duties by Byng to be satisfied with such a poor concession as that. He had, moreover, conceived a strong personal attachment to Hugh, independent of the feeling that he was indebted to him for his life. He was very resolute to help the Captain to the very best

of his power, and still urgèd his point with the utmost obstinacy. But Polly was staunch to her promise, and would not give up the coveted address. A compromise was, however, at last effected between them, and Mrs. Tarrant consented to forward a letter from the Captain which would be placed in her hands.

With that assurance Peter returned to his principal, and judging by the time that Hugh took over that composition it was perhaps as well that no stipulation had been made as regarded its length.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WHAT SHALL I DO?”

SELFISHNESS, the philosophers tell us, is at the bottom of all our actions; that even those few good deeds upon which we look back with pleasurable pride and satisfaction have been prompted chiefly by the desire of gratifying our vanity or dazzling our neighbours. I am no upholder of this cynical creed myself, though nobody can deny that the sin of ostentatious benevolence is rife in the land. Still I am sadly afraid that Tom Byng's strenuous exertions on behalf of his friend were not altogether disinterested. He might not be conscious of it himself, but lurking somewhere in the recesses of his mind must have been the thought that if his most intimate friend should marry the most intimate friend of Miss Smerdon, that he and

Frances would shortly come together was pretty well as certain as that two and two make four. He certainly had worked hard to bring that marriage about, and that he should be awaiting news from Manchester with considerable impatience was only natural. He knew that Hugh's letter had been dispatched and forwarded, and yet the days slipped by without his getting a line from him.

But if Byng was anxious as to what Miss Lynden's reply might be, it was nothing to the impatience which possessed Hugh. Not a day passed but what he visited the Tarrants' cottage only to receive a negative shake of the head from Polly in reply to the inquiry if there was "anything for him." He had bestowed *largesse* on Dick with so liberal a hand that that worthy pronounced him "quite the gentleman." He would have rewarded Polly in similar fashion, but she obstinately refused to touch his money, saying that whether she had acted rightly or wrongly it should never be said that she had

“done it for money.” He tormented her a good deal as to whether she was sure she had made no mistake about the address, and to quiet him, Polly was forced to explain that though she knew an address to which a letter directed would eventually reach Miss Lynden, she could not tell where it would be forwarded, and that, for all she knew, it might have to go abroad. Hugh, too, was very anxious to learn some particulars of Dr. Lynden’s death, but about that Polly could tell him nothing. She had his daughter’s own word for it that he was dead, and that was all she knew.

A week had elapsed, and still Polly only shook her head. What to do or what to think Hugh did not know. He did not like to leave Manchester until he had received his reply, and as to where Miss Lynden actually was, it was quite evident the secret was still her own, and that Mrs. Tarrant could not have betrayed her if she would. He walked up as usual one morning, and noticed care-

lessly that the window, contrary to custom, was closed. The door opened before he could knock, and Polly, arrayed in her bonnet and shawl, stepped eagerly into the passage.

“Go in,” she whispered, “I shan’t be back for an hour at least. Good luck to you, sir,” and with these words Mrs. Tarrant vanished. Hugh paused for a moment. His chance was come at last ; he was there to plead his cause and to win it, he earnestly hoped, but for all that he was conscious that he was going into court with hands not quite clean. He pushed open the door, and Nellie Lynden, in her sombre draperies, stood before him.

“Hugh,” she said, in tones that she vainly endeavoured to render steady, “I have come to hear from your own lips the truth. I have travelled from France to hear you give the denial to this story I have heard about you, with your own mouth. You could not stoop to lie to a woman still standing in the shadow of her father’s grave.”

"My dearest Nellie," he cried, advancing as if to embrace her.

"Stop, Hugh," she said, sadly. "I must have a full explanation from you before I decide whether we meet now for the last time or not. Three times have I thought that I should never see you more, and the last time was immeasurably the most painful of the three. I had wept for you and mourned for you as dead, when the terrible news came home that you were missing after the 8th of September, that no tidings could be gained of you, but—stop, don't interrupt me," she exclaimed as Hugh once more attempted to take her hand; "the saddest parting of all was the last, when I was told you were false to every vow that you had made me, and that the man for whom I had prayed for the last year, and who had cost me so many tears, had forgotten me, and was on his way home wedded to another woman."

"It was all false, false as can be," cried Hugh, conscience-stricken at the torture to

which he had subjected his betrothed. "Who put this abominable rumour about I don't know, but if ever I do, and it's a man, he will render strict account to me for the lie he has uttered. How it reached your ears I don't know, but the first I heard of the calumny was from Mrs. Montague."

A slight smile passed over Miss Lynden's face at the recollection of that lady's epistle.

"My father's information about things in the Crimea was both extraordinary and accurate. Was there not a Mademoiselle Ivanhoff?"

"Yes," returned Hugh, "and that is the lady with whom my name has been so falsely coupled. But I am neither married to her nor have I ever been engaged to her. I was and am pledged to you, Nellie, and anxious as ever to claim my bride as soon"—and he paused, and glanced at her dress, "as I can obtain leave to."

"And you are sure that you have no feeling for Mademoiselle Ivanhoff? She

nursed you through your long illness, did she not?" and as she put the question Miss Lynden watched her lover's face keenly.

"Yes, Sister Marie's nursing no doubt had a good deal to say with my pulling through. The doctors all said I owed as much to her care as I did to their treatment."

It's possible that Miss Lynden had her own misgivings as to how far feelings of gratitude had carried Hugh with his nurse, but after all the rumours she had heard, it was a triumph to find her peccant lover still at her feet. She knew that patients at times do conceive a *tendresse* for their nurses, and in her delight at finding he was still her very own Hugh she was disposed to ignore such frailties as might have befallen him in his days of convalescence, but she would hardly have been a woman if she had omitted to ask the one question:

"Is Mademoiselle Ivanhoff pretty?"

And Hugh would have been the veriest fool if he had replied otherwise than:

"No, I don't think so, but I have heard men call her good-looking."

Ah, Madame Vashta, if you could only have heard that one little speech, how delighted you would have been with the results of your handiwork.

But by this time Hugh had not only obtained possession of her hand, but might be said to have taken possession of Miss Lynden generally, for she was clasped in his arms and he was pressing passionate kisses on her unresisting lips.

"Do be quiet, Hugh," she said, at length releasing herself from his embrace. "Sit down do, and tell me all that has happened to you since you were taken prisoner."

"My darling, I haven't seen you for so long, and I feared I had lost you."

"Now do be rational. I am sure if all the other young men that have been to the Crimea are making up for lost time as quickly as you, their sweethearts have nothing to complain of. Now tell me exactly what

happened to you after you were struck down in that dreadful Redan."

"I have not much recollection of the first part of it," replied Hugh. "I have an idea of feeling very ill and only wishing people would let me alone, but when I first came fairly to my senses I was with half-a-dozen others in one of the country carts, suffering great pain and tortured with the most horrible thirst. I fancy I was off my head a good bit after that, for my memory seems all a chaos from then, until I found myself in bed in the hospital at Batchi Serai, awfully weak, and feeling nothing but a languid curiosity as to where I was and how I had got there. From that there's nothing much to tell. I slowly came round as men do after a long illness, and when I was really about again, found myself a prisoner in the capital of the old Tartar Khans. The Russians were all very kind to me, but life there was pretty much what it is in all country towns, dull and monotonous."

“And this Mademoiselle Ivanhoff nursed you?”

“Yes, and a very devoted nurse she was to me and many others,” replied Hugh judiciously. “We parted, I am sorry to say, on not very good terms, and it’s not likely I shall ever see her again. But now, Nellie, it is time you told me something of your proceedings. Your father’s death, for instance—how did that happen? Was he ill long?”

“It was horrible,” said the girl with a shudder. “It was at Boulogne, only a month ago. There was nothing the matter with him. He went out to smoke a cigar on the pier, as he had done two or three times before. I went to bed, and when I awoke the next morning I was told that he had been found in the water quite dead. The whole case was at once taken possession of by the police, and there was a rigid enquiry as to how he got into the water. But nothing ever came of it. There was a heavy bruise on his

temple, most likely caused by his striking against one of the piles. It was a darkish night, and my belief is that he accidentally walked over the side of the pier, was stunned by the blow on the head he received when falling, and so was drowned almost without a struggle. There were vessels lying close by, and sailors and so on were about all night, but no one heard his cry for help. I only know poor papa perished without a hand being stretched out to save him." And a tear or two trickled down Miss Lynden's cheeks, for one who, though not a sympathetic, had always been an indulgent father to her.

"I am very sorry for the poor Doctor," said Hugh; "it must have been dreadfully sad for you, Nell."

"Yes," replied the girl softly, "for I thought I was left all alone in the world."

"Ah, but you know that is not so," rejoined Hugh, gently pressing her hand. "You were mistaken about that. But what made

you leave Manchester so abruptly, without telling any one where you were going?"

"I don't know. Our life has been a puzzle to me from that time to my father's death. We left, as you would say, without beat of drum, remained a day or two in London, and then crossed at once to the Continent, where we wandered up and down with no conceivable motive. Papa briefly explained he had business here and business there, but what his business was he never confided to me. Our wanderings seemed to be perfectly aimless, and after the fall of Sebastopol papa seemed to be more restless than ever. As I have already told you, his information about things in the Crimea was wonderful, and I did think," she added, smiling fondly on her lover, "marvellously accurate. It was he who told me you were engaged to be married to Mademoiselle Ivanhoff. Perhaps the wish was father to the thought, for he never liked the idea of my marrying you. I don't know why."

"Ah! you see, Nell, my people didn't receive the news of my engagement to you with much cordiality. I dare say the Doctor thought that my father might have written to him more effusively on the subject. Bless him, he didn't know that dear old gentleman when things are not going to his liking."

"Oh, but, Hugh, what does he—what do all your people think of our engagement now?"

"So far," rejoined Fleming, "they haven't had any occasion to think about it. As I didn't get killed, and contrived to be mentioned in dispatches, they were bound to kill the fatted calf for me during my brief visit, and, as I had completely lost you, there was nothing to be said about you."

"But what will they think of it now, Hugh?"

"Well, the governor won't like it; but then as he wouldn't like my marrying anybody unless she had unlimited shekels, that's not worth considering. If she had only heaps

of money I might marry a Hottentot. But then you see I've got to live with her, not him."

"But, Hugh, what shall I do? I have no one to advise me."

"Do, darling? marry me quite quietly in two or three months and then, you see, you will always have someone to advise you," a bit of special pleading which brought a smile to Miss Lynden's lips. "Now that's settled," continued Hugh, "How is Miss Smerdon? What makes her so huffy? There's no pleasing her. We've done our best to blazon the colours, and paid pretty dearly for the right of carrying 'Sebastopol' on them."

"I don't understand you. Why, where did you meet her?"

"I haven't met her," rejoined Hugh, "but I wrote to her to know where I could find you."

"Ah, she couldn't tell you because she didn't know."

"No, but she needn't have answered me as

if I was almost a stranger, considering the terms we were on before I left England."

"I think I can explain all that," said Miss Lynden, laughing. "Frances is a very warm *friend*, and I had a most affectionate letter from her the other day, but she was not going to encourage young men in marrying Russian countesses."

"You haven't seen her, I suppose, since you left Manchester?"

"No, nor heard from her until the other day, but why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Hugh carelessly. "We used to think, you know, there was something between her and Tom Byng."

"Yes, but I'm not clear that anything will come of it now. She wrote to him when we all thought he was so badly wounded, and though I never saw his reply I know very well what it must have been. 'She railed at herself that she should be so immodest as to write to one she knew would flout her.'"

"Yes. Tom has kept a very still tongue

on that subject ever since that letter. But, Nell, he has stood by me in my search for you like a brick. He has taken no end of trouble, and it was he, you know, who really found out your address after all."

"He has always been a staunch friend to you," replied Miss Lynden, "from the day that I first set eyes upon you when he was coaching you in your match."

"Dear old Tom, I should never have won it but for him. If we find they are still in earnest, we must manage to put things straight between them," and here a discreet rattling of the latch warned them of the return of Mrs. Tarrant.

"You said you wouldn't be back for an hour," said Fleming reproachfully, as Polly entered the room.

Mrs. Tarrant threw a look of the liveliest satisfaction at the lovers, and replied smilingly as Hugh rose to go :

"Indeed, Captain, I have been away much nearer two hours than one."

Hugh murmured mendaciously something about the difference of clocks, while affecting to consult his own watch, and then prepared to escort Nellie back to the lodgings at which she was staying. As he bid Mrs. Tarrant good-day, she said in a low voice :

"You've offered me a present, Captain Fleming. You shall give me a new bonnet to wear at the wedding."

"That I will," replied Hugh, "the very smartest you can find in Manchester," and as the pair walked away together, Polly felt that Major Byng did know something about these things after all."

CHAPTER XIV.

“LOVE MUST BE REQUITED.”

SERGEANT EVANS, when he had once convinced himself that Dr. Lynden was decidedly not engaged in the manufacture of base money, looked upon his avocations as no longer any business of his. He had little doubt what the Doctor was, in his own mind ; but granted he was a Russian spy, still the Sergeant did not see exactly how he was to interfere in the case. Criminals of all classes he had tracked and hunted down, there was no offence against the law of which he was not thoroughly cognisant, but he did not see under what head the Doctor's offence could be classified. It was a crime not mentioned in the statute-book, and therefore the Sergeant finally concluded it was no affair of his, and that,

especially as the culprit had fled, he would trouble himself no more about it. Still, to an enthusiast like the Sergeant, the thing had a great fascination. He positively revelled in the unravelling of the elaborate webs woven by the felonious classes, and although he could not exactly make up his mind that the Doctor belonged to them, and though professionally it would be waste of time to further investigate the matter, still he was curious about the Doctor's former life and antecedents. He read the account of his death in the paper, for it had attracted some little attention, for though eventually determined to be accidental, there had been a suspicion of foul play in the first instance, and this recalled the affair once more to his recollection.

It so happened that duty connected with the apprehension of a gang of swindlers who had been engaged in what is technically known as "the long firm business," carried him over to Paris, and on his way back he resolved to have a palaver with his brethren of

the French police at Boulogne with regard to Dr. Lynden's death.

"Ah, it was a strange affair that," said one of their number. "We could make nothing of it. I don't believe it was an accident any more than I do that he threw himself into the water. There was no more unlikely man to do that than the Doctor—besides, he had no reason to do anything of the kind."

"You knew him then?" said Sergeant Evans.

"Ah, no, not personally," rejoined the Frenchman, "but we knew a good deal more about him this side the water than you did. You would find his *dossier* in the Rue Jerusalem. He was an adventurer and a very sly old fox, quite of *la premiere force*. His colleagues have occasionally been laid by the heels, but never himself. Why he left his own country we never knew, but he has been dabbling in financial and political schemes on the Continent all his life."

"Was he ever in the employment of the Russian Government?" asked Evans.

"I can't say. Likely as not. They pay their agents well, that Government, and are clever at choosing them."

"You think he was murdered?" said the Sergeant.

"Ah, who can say?" rejoined the Frenchman. "I can fancy there were some who desired his death. He knew too much."

No further light was ever thrown upon the Doctor's fate or career; with regard to the latter, it was, perhaps, as well that it should remain shrouded in obscurity. While as regards the former, the Frenchman's remark was perhaps as appropriate an epitaph as any. He knew too much.

Great was the exultation of Tom Byng when he tore open a telegram from Hugh, which contained these words, "Victory all along the line. Dispatches by post. You most honourably mentioned." And when Hugh appeared personally a day or two later,

Tom voted it as an occasion of high festival, and was speedily lost in anxious consultation with the cook and wine butler. High and late was the revel that night, but ere it finished Tom was solemnly pledged to act as best man, or, as he more practically put it, had promised to see his chum through. He learnt next morning that Miss Lynden had gone to stay at Twmbarlyn until her marriage, and that Hugh intended to follow her there very shortly, having received already most cordial congratulations as well as an invitation from Mrs. Smerdon. "And a very different note," he added, "to the last from Miss Smerdon. Somebody, it seems, had told her that confounded story about the Russian Countess."

Hugh Fleming and his *fiancée* had had more than one talk over this Beatrice and Benedick of the Crimean war. They both agreed that the less they interfered the better; but, as Hugh said, "If they don't get thrown enough together over our wedding to settle

their own affairs it must be through sheer perversity."

" 'She will rather die than give any sign of affection,' " laughed Nellie in reply, to which Hugh had rejoined :

" Then it will be for me to drum into Tom's head that ' Love must be requited.' "

Numberless were the discussions that took place between the two friends about Hugh's future. Where the marriage was to take place was also a topic of considerable debate. The Smerdons, who insisted on standing in the light of parents to Nellie on this occasion were anxious that it should take place from Twmbarlym, while Frances, as soon as she had definitely ascertained that Major Byng was to act as Hugh's backer at the ceremony, obstinately declined to open her lips upon the subject. Hugh, on the contrary, rather inclined to the wedding taking place in Town. He was anxious that some of his brother officers, and other of his old military friends, who were now on leave, should be present.

Though Twmbarlyn was a good house, the putting up of ten or a dozen young men would test its resources to the uttermost. Then again, both Peter Phybbs and Polly Tarrant would feel hurt if they were not present at the marriage. It was a point difficult to decide. Although quite aware that it was inimical to his own interests, Tom would not venture to express an opinion in favour of Twmbarlyn. He knew, no one better, the advantages of staying in a good country house under like circumstances. If a man couldn't manage to unravel the tangled skein of his love under those conditions, his case was indeed hopeless, and with a tinge of regret he found this momentous question eventually settled in favour of St. George's, Hanover Square. In reality, I fancy, whatever they might think, the decision by no means lay with either Hugh or Nellie. Milliners and dressmakers are paramount at such times, and these issued a mandate that they must have the young lady in Town, and that she must

remain there, and that if not they could not be answerable for her "things" — a stupendous threat, that no woman would venture to stand out against.

It had been a queer fancy of Hugh's, and Nellie had yielded to his wish, that their wedding should take place on the anniversary of the fall of Sebastopol, the day that had so very nearly proved fatal to him, and on a bright September morning a gay party trooped up the steps of the old church, so famous in past days for fashionable marriages. There was a gallant muster of Hugh's old comrades and other soldier friends, among others Jim Lockwood, who told Hugh that he looked upon this as a very remarkable solemnity, and he only hoped he had been perfectly candid with Mrs. Fleming that was to be. "Because," said the Hussar, "if you fellows marry again in the way you come to life again, it won't be long before she has to bring her action of bigamy." But for all this chaff, Mrs. Fleming numbers no handsomer

souvenir of her wedding day than the bangle sent by the Dragoon.

Besides the group at the steps of the altar there were a few spectators scattered amongst the pews. Mrs. Tarrant was there, with her husband and brother, taking, we may be sure, the greatest possible interest in the whole affair, so much so indeed that Polly's eyes wandered in all directions. Nobody in the church was likely to escape her quick eyes. In her heart she thought the church by no means so crowded as it should be for a function of such importance. Suddenly she gave a slight start as she caught sight of two ladies in a prominent place, sitting to her right. Both were richly and fashionably dressed. The one was a dark-eyed, handsome girl, whose face wore a look of contemptuous scorn as she gazed upon the two principals. Her companion was a woman approaching the autumn of life, but still retaining quite sufficient good looks to make one wish one could only have seen her in her meridian.

Polly craned forward to get a good view of this pair, and for a minute or so even the scene before the altar ceased to rivet her attention.

“Dick,” she whispered, “there she is again, the lady with the roses. Don’t you remember the woman you saw coming out of Dr. Lynden’s door at Manchester?”

“No, is it ; are you sure?”

“Quite certain, Dick.”

“Well it don’t matter much anyway,” replied Mr. Tarrant. “The Doctor’s gone, and whatever his little game was he can’t be run in for it now, that’s certain.”

“Follow her as soon as she goes out. I want to know where she lives.”

“What for?”

“Never mind. Do as I tell you. I want to know who she is,” and Mr. Tarrant having growled a responsive “All right,” Polly became absorbed again in the marriage service.

“Well, Marie,” said the elder lady, as, the

affair concluded, friends crowded round the newly-married pair with their congratulations, "I really should like to know what your particular motive for coming here this morning was. Yes, I know you wished to see how these things were done in England, but it was something more than that."

"My dear aunt," replied Mademoiselle Ivanhoff, "Captain Fleming is an old friend of mine."

"Nonsense, child. I don't believe you ever saw—— Yes, now I look in your face, I think you have met before. Where?"

"In the Crimea," rejoined Mademoiselle Ivanhoff demurely.

"Impossible. I know he was there, and I know you were there, but meet?"

"Yes, my aunt, we took prisoners at times, you know—I took him."

"Marie, you're incorrigible," said the elder lady as she broke into a peal of laughter.

"He escaped me," said Mademoiselle

Ivanhoff, “and I was curious to see what sort of a woman had captured the renegade. Ah, I wonder who the next will be. He was nice, my Englishman.”

Mr. Tarrant, in compliance with his wife’s desire, followed the ladies home to a house in Upper Brook Street, and having ascertained the number, turned into the nearest book-seller’s and requested leave to look at a Blue Book. A reference to this told him that this was the residence of a Mr. Clifford, with which piece of information he went back to his wife. The name told nothing to Polly, and she was none the wiser for having discovered the identity of the lady of the roses, but happening to come across Sergeant Evans some few months later in Manchester she told him about it. He made no remark, but was probably the only man in England who saw the connection between Dr. Lynden’s flight and the abrupt dismissal of Mr. Clifford from a senior clerkship in the Foreign Office.

We are not told that Benedick married Beatrice, but when the curtain falls, as the Scotchman said, "Things look vary suspicious."

THE END.

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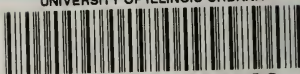
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